

A man wearing a white head covering and a light-colored tunic is standing on a dirt floor, using a long-handled wooden tool to thresh grain. A large, billowing cloud of golden dust or chaff rises from the pile of grain he is working on. The background is filled with tall palm trees under a clear sky. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

Spiritual Preparation for Renewal

Before you can eat, preparation must be made. Although we do not need to make a trip to the threshing floor before baking a loaf of bread, someone has made the preparations for us.

This brief study has been prepared to guide those who will use it prior to entering a renewal process for your personal life and your church.

As with proper preparation for a meal may this prayer guide assist you in preparing for your renewal process.

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In scripture, each time God was about to do some great move among and for the Israelites, He always required something of them. The following is written to give a devotional guide for individuals and your church as you prepare for a journey to renewal, revitalization, or recommitment. Extra note pages can be found in the of this book.

If you would like more copies of this guide, they can be downloaded for free from the alsbom.com/ church revitalization resources webpage.

Session1

Listening and Acting in Obedience

Don, your supervisor, has put together a team consisting of you, Mary, Sue, and John to accomplish a task that will require long physically and mentally draining hours, evenings away from family, and stretching each one beyond your experience level. The deadline is short, but your team has pulled it off with success. Well, at least three of you. John came in a half hour late every day and would not stay one minute past his regular eight-hour shift. The rest of you arrived on time and put in 14-16 hours each day for nearly two weeks. Now, following the successful completion of the assignment, Don, the boss, gives John a weekend getaway for his effort on the team. You and the others receive only a thank you, while you watch the boss praise John and award him in front of the entire company.

How would you feel?

Perhaps. Like many people, you actually feel your blood pressure rising just reading this scenario.

Can you think of a time when you witnessed a boss rewarding a person in your organization who had nothing to do with the accomplishment being rewarded? How did you feel?

Would you reward your children for explicit disobedience against your wishes?

Read Judges 6:1-10

If we expect God to bless (reward) us, we must first be right with God. In this text God reminds of the suffering of the Israelites was due to their disobedience to Him. The oppression from the Midianites was so heavy that verse 6 says the Israelites cried out to God.

While your church may not be experiencing the same type of oppression, what has God, through the Holy Spirit led you to realize about your own situation compared to that of Israel as you read this passage? (if you need to, re-read the passage asking God to show you your church's situation through this passage)

It has been said, "a person will not come to the point of rebuilding, until he/she first comes to the point of weeping over the situation." Have you personally come to the point of not calling out, but crying out to God? Yes No

If not, where do you believe is that threshold for you?

Spend some time in prayer right now about what you have just written considering the current situation of your church. Write part of your prayer here:

If the narrative of verses 7-10 had been written in the current context of your church, how would it read?

*I have given you this land and these facilities. I have protected you from Government intervention...I have placed you in this community. I have*_____

_____ and yet you have not listened to me.

Spend some time in prayer asking for God's forgiveness for the ways your church (or you personally) have not listened and acted in obedience to God. (tradition, not reaching into the community)

On the next page consider the question for your church in light of Israel's situation in Judges 6:1-10.

1. Where are we now? – Thinking on the passage of Judges 6:1-10 where is your church today in accordance to God's will for His church?

How will you share these thoughts with God? Begin your prayer here.

Session 2

What Stops You From Moving in God's Power?

It is said that a crocodile's jaw strength can be up to 3,700 psi (pounds per square inch). However, it appears to be nowhere near as strong as a mother who needs to save her child. What makes this story different is that we are not talking about a young child, the daughter in this situation was 25-years old. This story demonstrates that a mother's love and need to protect her young does not elapse as children age.

Rohima was just your average mom who lived in a village in Indonesia. She had decided to go out for a run when she heard a sound no mother wants to hear. She heard the terrifying screams of her 25-year-old daughter, Trisna. The type of scream is the one all moms know instantly in their gut, that something is very wrong.

When she met up with her daughter, she was horrified, her daughter's leg was clenched in the mouth of an 18-foot-croc. Rohima immediately went into fight mode and started kicking the creature. When that did not work, she wrenched open the jaws of the crocodile with her bare hands. Trisna got her leg free. She did have to receive 50 stitches, but she was alive thanks to her mother.

We read stories of people like Rohima performing feats of super-human strength, but even greater than super-human strength is supernatural power that exceeds human and super-human strength.

Read Judges 6:11-22

We first see Gideon blaming God – “But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.”

While we do not consider ourselves as blaming God for our circumstances, how often have we said something as, “God is not bringing them in.” or “God is not helping us grow.”? In these statements we are much like Gideon.

Has God abandoned his church or has the church not followed in direct obedience to God?

Is it time to lead your church in a time of repentance, praying, asking for God’s forgiveness, so you can move forward in His power and his strength? How would you begin that prayer?

Instead of replying in the manner Gideon expected, God does something different. God’s angel had come to one individual, Gideon with a directive. The LORD turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?”

How much extra strength was God going to give Gideon to destroy the Midianites? _____

The answer is none. God said, “Go in the strength you have.” Likewise, God has given your church what it needs to be obedient to Him. There is not one thing God has called you to do that He has not also equipped you for. We only need to trust and act in obedience. The nation Israel had acted in disobedience and had suffered seven (7) years as consequence for their disobedience.

Next, we read Gideon trying to tell God why he could not be the one to lead. He was only one small (puny) man and of the weakest tribe in all of Israel. Yet God was advising Gideon to

go and lead the charge. It does not matter that you are only one man/woman or that your church is too small...God has a directive for you. Are you listening for His directive?

Instead of listening for God's Directive, many churches in our society today are trying to write their own directive. In these directives we want it to be God working and us sitting in our comfort zone, not doing any more than we are already doing. As the church has a directive from God, so each person in the congregation also has a directive from God. And each person's directive is in direct correlation to his/her God-given gifts.

In your church what is your personal God-given directive or part of the church's deliverance?

Take time right now to pray that God will give you open ears to hear, clear mind to understand, and a heart like His for the community around you.

Write two critical lines of your prayer here:

2. For what do we believe God would have us reach as a church?

If this is what God would have us strive toward, what will our prayer be?

Session 3

Are You Ready for God to Act?

Have you ever been in a crowd where everyone was moving, pressing in one direction and you needed to go in the opposite direction?

The story is told in Luke chapter 4 of Jesus being led outside the city to the very edge of a cliff by an angry mob whose intentions were of throwing Him over the edge. The only thing between life and death for Jesus was one nudge from the pressing crowd. Yet Jesus, scripture says, turned and walked right through the crowd and went on His way.

There is no way, physically, that this could happen. Indeed, it was not physical. God intervened, and Jesus did the impossible, walked through the angry crowd that was pressing in the opposite direction. When God intervenes, there is no need to fear, as Gideon was learning.

Read Judges 6:23-32

When Gideon realized it was the angel of the Lord He had been speaking with, Gideon built an Altar to the Lord at that spot and called it The Lord is Peace. When you have an encounter with God, you want to recognize Him. Gideon did by building an altar.

Reflect on a time when you realized that you had been in God's presence – when you realized something you just witnessed was God at work. What would you title your personal experience?

That same night, God instructed Gideon to tear down the community altar built to worship Baal and the Asherah pole, a wooden pole constructed for worshipping the goddess Asherah. In their place he was to build an altar to the one and only true God. On this Altar Gideon was instructed to sacrifice his father's 2nd bull using the wood of the Asherah pole as firewood. Gideon had sacrificed his father's 1st bull (prize bull) earlier that day. Now he is to sacrifice his father's #2 bull.

When God is about to use you to do some great thing, he always expects something of you. God cannot use anyone who acts in disobedience. Gideon knew it was God speaking to him and he knew his obedience was the only correct course of action. Gideon also knew the townspeople would not take kindly to this action. So, he gathered 10 men and tore down the idol altars, built an altar according to God's specifications and sacrificed his father's bull to God. He did this in the darkness of night.

Gideon knew the townspeople would do whatever it took to stop him if they saw him doing this. I'm sure he would rather have been sleeping. He did it at night, not out of fear, but so the work of God's command could be carried out without interruption.

Gideon was obedient to God even though it meant giving up sleep and bringing the anger of the town on him. Today, we seldom do anything for God that is outside of our comfort zone, much less it go against culture.

Pray asking God to help you live outside your comfort zone. To be like Gideon, following the Lord in obedience even when it brings discomfort to you. Write part of your prayer here:

In session 2 you answered the question For what do we believe God would have us reach as a church?

3. How would we (as a church) rate our ability to accomplish what we stated in session #2 (For what do we believe God would have us reach as a church)?

Physical 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Financial 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Spiritual 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Spend time in prayer as a church family asking God for clarity and strength in all three areas listed above, physical, financial, spiritual. Use the following as part of your prayer and then write some specifics you will pray.

O God, our God, we need Your strength to carry out Your desires and purposes for us. We are guilty too often of attempting in our strength. Forgive us of this and lead us to follow in obedience in your strength. You have given us all that we need. May we listen to Your wise counsel and follow in obedience in Your strength. Lord hold us accountable by...

Session 4

Do Not Wait for Another Sign

George Mueller had a heart for the orphans of England. He started by building five large orphan houses and cared for 10,024 orphans in his lifetime. When he started in 1834 there were accommodations for 3,600 orphans in all of England but twice that many children under eight years of age were in prison because they had no place else to live.

While Mueller did not have the means to provide any of this, not even the first building, it was accomplished. It may be hard to believe but he never asked anyone for money. What did he do to secure the needed funds to care for so many children in so many orphanages? He simply prayed. He prayed that if God really wanted him to build these orphanages and care for these thousands of orphans, He, God, would have to provide the funding for it. So Mr. Mueller determined to never solicit help from anyone for anything for these orphanages and the needs of the orphans. He was a man of his word. Mueller never, not once, asked for assistance in providing for this endeavor or caring for the orphans. Well, he did not ask any humans. He did ask God - daily. He took the first step of faith and God met him there.

If he had waited on a sign from God first, not one orphanage would have ever been built and thousands of orphaned children in England would have probably died. The only sign he needed was the burden for orphans God had placed on his heart. This man had a radical faith and one that trusted God completely.

Have you come to place where you realize a burden on your own heart for God's work? Yes No If yes, write that burden here:

Gideon knew he had been speaking with God and The Angel of the Lord. Yet Gideon doubted, perhaps he was skeptical. So, he asked God for a sign. We should always be cautious to insure we are moving according to God's Will. But do we need another sign?

Read Judges 6:33-40

God gave Gideon the exact sign he was looking for, a wet fleece when there was no dew on the ground. Another physical impossibility. God delivered, gave the humanly impossible sign.

You would think Gideon would be ecstatic. Yet, Gideon was not ready. He asked God to reverse the sign. The next night Gideon asked God to cover the ground with dew, but to keep the dew off the fleece. God did exactly what Gideon asked for.

Perhaps Gideon was stalling. We, in the church today are much like Gideon, we are stalling. We know the task God has called us to – take the good news of Jesus to everyone we meet. Yet, we hide behind the veils of fear and skepticism. We keep looking for a sign. "If God wants me to speak to that person, God will..."

Or perhaps Gideon was full of doubt. Doubt is a peculiar thing. Doubt often causes a desire to delay or get completely out of doing something we've been asked to do.

In fact, often in doubt, we have received a clear directive from God, but because we don't want to do it, we keep asking for more signs. We ask but hope the signs will not come. We don't

want to obey, especially if it's hard or causes us to move beyond our own comfort. We don't want to trust God unless it is easy on us. We don't want to act unless we know the positive outcome.

We keep waiting for God to do something so miraculous that the work will be done without us lifting a finger. Why? Because we do not want to get out of our comfort zone. After all that would be – uncomfortable. Our churches are declining today because we have bought into the false belief that Christianity is a life of comfort as long as we do certain things; church attendance, give a little money and maybe serve on a committee. The issue is, not one of those things is listed in the Great Commission.

We are looking for a sign when God has already given us everything we need – including the Holy Spirit living in us. The Holy Spirit is God! We have everything we need right in our own being. Yet, like Gideon, we stall.

Pray right now asking God to reveal your lack of belief that He has given you everything you need. Also, ask for His forgiveness as you have stalled from complete obedience to Him waiting for a sign.

4. What is my first step to becoming an active completely obedient follower of Christ?

How can I use what I've learned today to assist my church family in preparing for the assignment ahead, even if it is to face a giant of an enemy? Write your answer in the form of a prayer to God. (If you need more space use back of book)

Session 5

The Victory Belongs to The Lord Almighty

In 1967, the small nation of Israel (population less than 2.5 million) defeated four much larger and stronger Arab nations. Four Arab nations surrounding Israel had been planning a unified attack to destroy Israel. Israel was aware of their plans and in only six (6) days the small nation of Israel defeated the four nations of Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, and Syria.

On the first day less than 200 Israeli airplanes had crippled or destroyed the much larger air defenses of all four nations.

The Golan Heights was a well-fortified Syrian front in the Six-Day War. Israeli commander Musa Klein, stationed in the Heights, had only 25 men left in his platoon after fierce fighting. Approaching a Syrian position, he ordered it to be charged upon by his few (25) men, unaware that it was one of the strongest Syrian positions in the Heights, rigged with an impressive array of machine guns, mortars and bunkers. Before the Syrians knew what was happening, a cry of Arabic rang out from inside the fortified post: "The Jews are already inside, and we've taken heavy casualties!" The Israeli commander's attack had been an outstanding success.

Israeli desert troops made their way into the Sinai Peninsula, readying an attack on the well-armed Kusseima military outpost. Massive explosions were heard inside the base, and by the time the Israelis arrived, they found the Egyptians had destroyed their own equipment and fled in fear. Egypt had abandoned other military bases as well as Israelis approached. Sounds like something of biblical proportions, doesn't it?

God's power is greater than all others on earth, and He is still in the miracle business.

We'll remember from Judges chapter 6 that when Gideon believed he was too small, inexperienced, and unimportant to lead God's army, "God said, go in the strength you have" (v. 14). God was about to show Gideon that the strength he had was the strength of Almighty God. Gideon had rounded up 32,000 fighting men. In the first part of chapter seven (7) we see God paring that number down.

Read Judges Chapter 7.

God tells Gideon to send everyone home who is afraid or who fears the battle. When Gideon announces this to the troops, 22,000 leave to return home. Gideon is about to go to battle against 130,000+ men - six (6) times as many enemy soldiers. Astronomical, impossible odds in human terms. But God is not finished yet.

God pares down the number in Gideon's army to only 300 men. 300 versus 135,000, a humanly impossible task. But with this number God will demonstrate His power and ability. No one will be able to take credit for this humanly impossible action. Gideon, his army, the nation of Israel, and the entire world would realize this battle was won only by the power of the great God of Israel.

You and I serve that same God. When God is in it, we are not too small, or too few. God is greater than all the enemies we face. God is bigger than any obstacle in front of you. Do you believe this? If you find yourself as Gideon in the first verses of chapter six, put your trust in the ALMIGHTY God and allow Him to write your chapter seven – the victorious triumph of your story.

If God can deliver Israel through Gideon, and again in 1967 from the hands of four powerful Arab nations, what keeps you from trusting God in your (meager in comparison) situation? Write your answer to that question below:

Take your answer to the question above and turn it into a prayer requesting forgiveness and plea to God for trust beyond what you've ever experienced. Write a portion of your prayer below.

God is the Victor. To Him belongs all credit, glory, and honor. You can live in and enjoy the victory of God, but only if you trust Him fully.

5. What must I become to come to this place of complete trust to see the victories of God as did Gideon and the Israelites in his day and in 1967?

Stop now and ask for God's help in you becoming that Disciple of complete trust in Him.

Session 6

Plan for Building a Winning Team

In the movie *Hoosiers*, Gene Hackman plays a high school basketball coach recruited by the principal of a small rural community school. This community is used to everything being a certain way, including the way the basketball team is coached. Some in the community are against the coach from the beginning because he is an outsider. Throughout the movie many others turn against the coach because of his seemingly ridiculous coaching methods. However, in his first season as coach, he leads the team to the state championship.

Read Judges chapter seven

Though we read this for the previous session, we also see in chapter seven, that Gideon did not charge ahead blindly, expecting God to take care of everything while Gideon and the troops acted haphazardly. No, Gideon made plans, strategic plans for the battle. God gave Gideon the wise strategic plans to conquer the nations that had come against Israel.

The tactics or methods used by the basketball coach in *Hoosiers* were different from what the community knew or expected. But they turned out to be winning tactics. Much of the townspeople were uncomfortable with this new coach's tactics. It was not until the team was on their way to the state championship game did some get on board and support the coach and team.

The same is true in church life. We get so used to things running a certain way, that when something is changed, we get upset. I've been in churches where even adding one song or

changing the order of service on Sunday morning causes disruption and conflict. There is more than one way to fry chicken, and there is more than one way to do ministry – as long as it is God’s way.

Pray asking God to help you to not be a stumbling block to His ministry, even when what is being proposed goes against what you desire.

Gideon laid out a strategic plan for his 300 fighting men, and it was not typical battle arrangements. His first commands was to divide into three segments and each man to take a trumpet, and a torch covered with a clay jar, to conceal its light. With only these instruments of battle, God led Gideon and the Israelis to victory.

6. God does not think like we think. We need to open our minds to God’s way of thinking. In what ways can you strengthen your bond with more useful thinking and listening to God’s unusual leading?

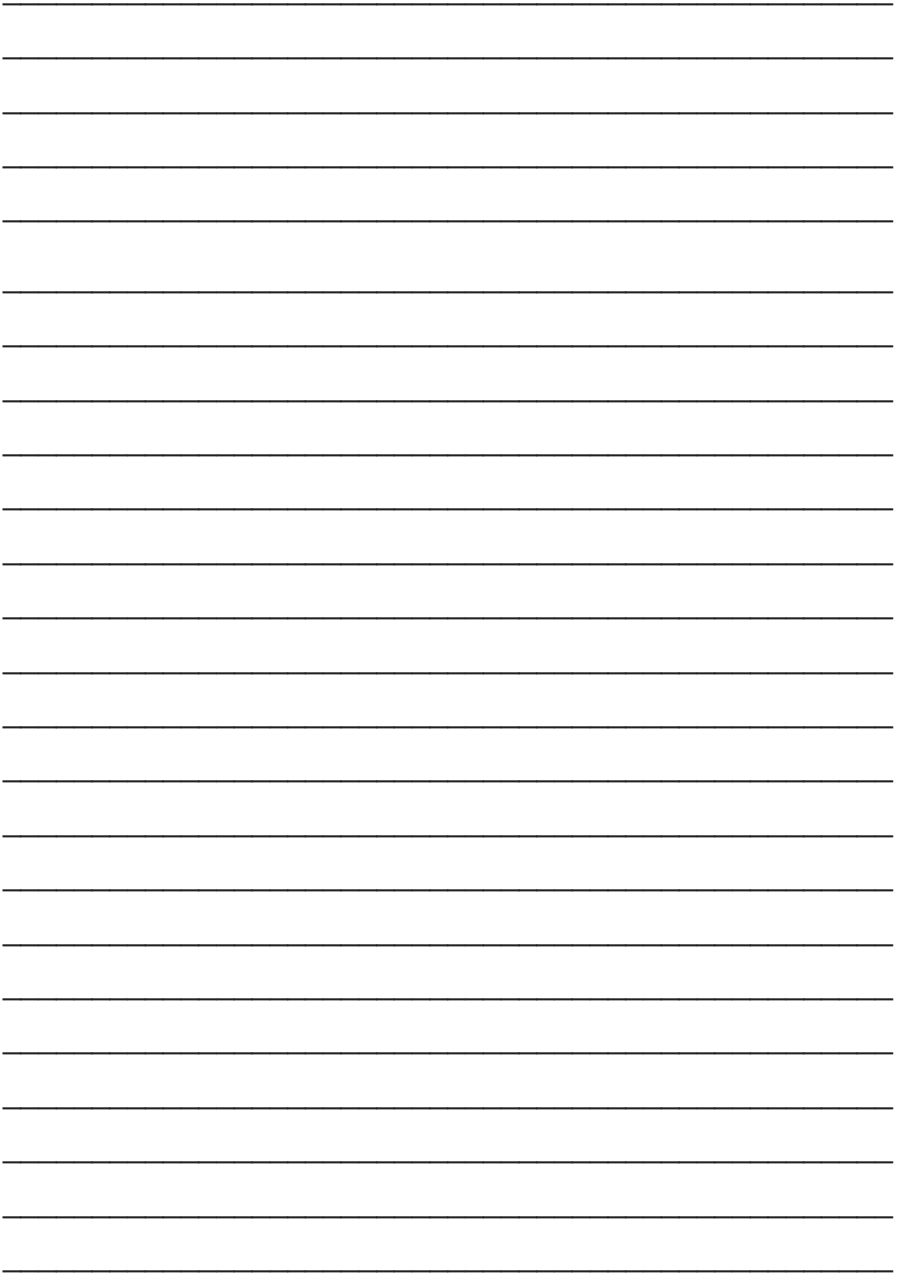
The first steps I am taking to allow God to penetrate my thinking and my actions for future ministry are:

Pray for the leadership in your church to seek the proper outside assistance and coaching to guide the church in identifying God's plan for the renewal of the ministry to the community.

List the start to your prayer here:

Pray also for the engagement of every member and attendee in the processes and plans for becoming the Great Commission church called has called you to be.

It is not a state championship basketball trophy for which you are playing. It is the eternal consequences of souls of those in your community and your circle of influence. Play for the win. Live for the win.





Compiled and written by George Yates for the
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