



On your marks

Gideon's story from the book of Judges is a favourite Old Testament tale for many of us. What Gideon achieved can teach us many things, but perhaps most significantly that God is not impressed by size or status. God chooses Gideon, who is the youngest in his family, which is the least important in its tribe, which in turn is one of the smaller tribes of Israel. As so often happens, God uses the last and the least to make it clear that it is the Lord and not us who wins the battle.

Get set

You can find the story in Judges 6-8. There is a retelling of this story in The Barnabas Children's Bible (stories 91-94).

You will need:

- 1p and 2p coins
- air-drying clay
- cardboard tubes
- silver paper
- red, orange and yellow tissue paper.

Go!

Background to the story

The book of Judges covers the period of Israel's history when the Israelites were still trying to settle themselves into the land of Canaan. In this new land, they lived alongside other ethnic groups, whose religion and culture often tempted them away from worshipping the one true God. They were also picked on as outsiders - in Gideon's day, it was the Midianites who repeatedly attacked and damaged their crops and often forced them into hiding. It seemed as if God had abandoned them, although it is clear from the story that it was in fact the Israelites who had abandoned their trust in the Lord. In this situation, God uses a very unremarkable young man called Gideon to rescue his people.

Opening up the story

Again and again throughout the Bible story and in Christian history, God chooses the least, the last and the most unlikely to do great things in his name.

Cut up a picture from the front of an old greetings card into a set of angular 'jigsaw' pieces. Include just one very small piece which should, if possible, have a key element of the picture on it - such as a name, a number or a key word. Give out the larger pieces to your group to reassemble, keeping the small piece back, which you should hide somewhere in the room. The picture is only complete of



course once it is all back together again and they have found the vital, small, missing piece.

Link this to the small but vital role young Gideon played in putting Israel back together again after years of wandering away from God.

Telling the story

Many of us can relate to the way Gideon responded to God's calling on his life. He is surprised to be chosen, full of doubts and questions, wants proof again and again, and remains diffident and cautious even when God has made it abundantly clear that he is the one God has chosen to defeat the country's enemies.

Using the following questions, based on what happens in the story, ask your group to respond with their first thoughts:

- How would you respond if an angel suddenly appeared under a tree in your garden? (Judges 6:11)
- ... or if the angel addressed you as a great military leader? (Judges 6:12)
- ... or if the angel told you to go and defeat the country's enemies? (Judges 6:14)
- ... or if the angel said God would help you and give you peace about it? (Judges 6:16)
- ... or if the angel then 'ate' up the food you brought, in a single burst of flame? (Judges 6:21)

And even though Gideon was now sure that he was hearing God's voice, he was still very cautious:

- He dismantled the local altar to a false god... but secretly at night. (Judges 6:27)
- And he hid behind his dad and let him speak up for him when the villagers got angry. (Judges 6:31)
- And he asked God for two more almost impossible signs to reassure him that his attack on the Midianites would be successful. (Judges 6:36-39)

Then we hear in Judges 7 of the most extraordinary battle ever - a battle which wasn't won by large numbers or superior weaponry!

To show how battling on God's side is so completely different, use the following illustration.

You need to gather 46 x 2p coins. Now put one 2p on one side of the table and the other 45 on the other side. These were the odds in the battle between Gideon's forces and those of the Midianite alliance - see Judges 7:3 and 8:10 for the statistics.

But God decided that Gideon's forces were too large! Take away one of the 2p coins and then put 15 of the remaining 45 on one side of the table and 30 on the other. This is what happened when challenged about whether they were scared or not, 2/3 of Gideon's forces went home.

But still this was too many to fight according to God! Convert the 2p coin you removed earlier into 2 x 1p coins. Now put a 1p coin on one side of the table and the other 45 x 2p coins and the remaining



1p coin on the other. This is how the force was split according to how they drank the water from the brook. Only 300 men, represented by the 1p coin, drank cautiously, keeping their eyes open and not with their faces buried in the water. It was this very small group that Gideon used to defeat the enemy according to God's directions.

And as for the fight itself, it involved no weapons at all! Describe how they surrounded the enemy camp at night and then re-enact what happened, using the lights from mobile phones, fists up to their mouths to make trumpets and dropping some of the coins, which you have now distributed among them, as the sound of the jars breaking. Recreate the sound of the victory as some shout 'for the Lord of the Gideon', others blow 'the trumpets', and everyone drops their coins and waves lights!

Talking about the story

- Do you think it was right of Gideon to ask God for a sign again and again?
- Have you ever asked God for a sign?
- Why do you think God chose a man like Gideon?
- Why do you think God wanted such a small number from Gideon's army involved in the battle?
- What does this story tell us about how we should face our battles every day?
- Which part of the story do you like the best?
- Which part of the story means most to you?

Playing with the story

As a group, create the strange weaponry Gideon's small force used to defeat the Midianites. This included clay jars, trumpets and torches.

Provide a range of materials for making these including: some air-drying clay, cardboard tubes, silver paper, and a supply of orange, yellow and red tissue paper to create flames for the torches.

These unusual weapons remind us as Christians today that the weapons we are to use are spiritual ones. Look up Ephesians 6:14-18.

Reflecting on the story

Hand out a 1p coin to each person in the group to represent themselves during the following time of prayer. Pile all the 2p coins in the middle of the circle around which you are sitting to represent any overwhelming challenges that you may all be facing in the week ahead.

Invite the group to think about what those challenges and battles might be for them, including situations at home, in school or in their own personal lives. Now invite everyone to consider the 1p coin and how small they are in comparison to these problems. But the story of Gideon teaches us that God uses the small and insignificant to make a difference. God is not impressed by numbers or size but cares about the little, the least and the last like us.

After a moment of quiet, invite everyone to put down their 1p coins around the pile of 2p coins and



to sum up their silent prayers by saying together several times 'For the Lord and for... (*adding their own name and other names as they choose*).