

22. Weakness



BIBLE STORY / REFERENCE

**Judges 6 and 7,
2 Corinthians 12:9**

God calls Gideon to lead the Israelites to victory over the Midianites



AIMS

To help the children understand that we all have times when we are weak and can't manage by ourselves, but that we can ask God for help and know his strength working through us

To help the children think about situations where they feel weak, and to bring those to God

God gives us strength in our weakness. If we depend on him when we are weak, that is when we can see his strength working through us.



PREP FOR LEADERS

Read through the Bible passages for this session and reflect:

- When are the times that Gideon feels weak, and how does God respond to him?
- Is there a time when you have known God giving you strength when you felt weak?

Take some time to pray for your group.



GAMES / INTRO ACTIVITIES

Choose one of the following activities to introduce today's theme:

▶ **Rock, Paper, Scissors Tournament**

This game works well with a larger group. *(An adaptation of this game, connected with next week's story can be found in Session 23 of One Big Story.)*

Make sure the children understand the hand gestures for the game:

Rock: clench your hand into a fist

Paper: hold your hand out flat with fingers together

Scissors: have your thumb,

ring finger and little finger tucked away and your index and middle fingers extended like the blades of scissors

Tell them they are going to compete against one another by choosing one of the three items and doing its hand gesture on the count of three.

Each of the items wins over one of the others as follows:

- Rock beats Scissors as it blunts them
- Scissors beats Paper as it cuts it
- Paper beats Rock as it covers it

After a couple of practice runs get the children to divide into pairs and compete against one another. If both people choose the same item they can play again until they have a winner.

(continued overleaf)

Get the children who were defeated to sit down. Those who are left in the game find a new partner and repeat the process.

Keep on doing this until you have a winner.

▶ **Strength Test**

You will need: weights or heavy objects, timer

Choose a couple of volunteers who think they are strong. Give each of them two heavy objects to hold, one in each hand. You could use weights if you have them, otherwise you can use tins of food or filled bottles (1 litre or more).

Get the volunteers to hold their arms straight out by their sides and challenge them to keep them in that position for a minute. You could use a video timer such as this one: youtu.be/uo9dAIQR3g8 to add to the drama.

At the end of a minute (or sooner if both volunteers drop their arms before then) ask the volunteers how they found it. Was it easier or more difficult than they expected? What would help them be able to hold their object in that position for longer?

Get them each to choose a friend to help. Then ask them to hold their arms out with the objects in each hand once again, but this time their friend can support them by holding up their arms under the biceps.

See if they are able to hold their arms out for longer or complete the challenge more easily.

Ask them what difference it made having someone to help.

▶ **Tower Building**

You will need: newspaper, sellotape, scissors, book

If you have a larger group, divide the children into groups

of four or five. Give each group some newspaper, sellotape and scissors, and challenge them to build a tower that is strong enough to hold a book on top for at least three seconds. The tower needs to be free-standing, not fixed to the table. Give them 5-10 minutes to complete the challenge and then test the towers to see if any of them are strong enough.



EXPLORING THE BIBLE

▶ **Recap**

Remind the children of how, after years of travelling in the wilderness, Joshua finally led the Israelite people into the land that God had promised to give them, and they were able to conquer the city of Jericho because they trusted in God.

▶ **Setting The Scene**

You would expect that this would be the happy ending. The Israelites' journey was over, and they had reached the land that God had given them.

Unfortunately, it didn't quite work out like that. There were lots of battles to be fought as there were other tribes in the land that didn't want them there.

Things went well for the Israelites when they listened to God and obeyed him, but they weren't good at doing this and after Joshua died the people turned away from God and started worshipping the other gods that the people in the land worshipped.

Reaching the Promised Land hadn't fixed the problem of sin. It was still a big issue that had to be dealt with.

The book of Judges tells the story of the Israelites during this time. They had turned

away from God, and there were consequences - at times God allowed them to be defeated by their enemies - but he still cared for them and he provided leaders for the people to help get them back on track. These leaders were called Judges and over the next few weeks we are going to hear about some of those Judges.

The first one we're going to think about is called Gideon.

▶ **Gideon's Story**

You will need: two plastic swords, pop-up tent (if you have one - an alternative could be a sheet or a blanket over a couple of chairs), words for Midianites (from additional document: Words for Midianites: Session 22), rams' horns (you could use party trumpets or simply roll sheets of card diagonally to form a horn shape and get the children to make the noise themselves)

Tell the story of Gideon - you could get the children to act it out.

(Choose child to be Gideon.)

God sent an angel to Gideon one day to give him a message. At this time the Israelites had been conquered by a tribe called the Midianites and they had been made to work as slaves for the last seven years. God sent the angel to Gideon with the message that he was the leader God was appointing to rescue the people. Gideon didn't really see himself as a mighty leader though. He thought "How can I rescue Israel? My family is the weakest family in our whole tribe, and I'm the youngest weakest person in my family."

Despite that, he was the one God had chosen so Gideon had to get an army together.

He knew the Midianites were pretty strong and powerful - they'd also got another couple of armies to join their side against the Israelites - and they'd set up camp nearby.

As we go through the story, look out for signs that Gideon was scared or worried about the task he faced.

(Choose two people to be Midianites - make sure they are people who are happy to read aloud. Give them swords and cards with their words, and get them to go to an area that represents their camp - a pop-up tent or chairs with a sheet or blanket over them.)

Gideon was quite scared, and he wanted to be sure the Israelites would win, so he spoke to God and said, "If you really are going to use me to rescue the Israelites, give me a sign to show me." Gideon took a wool fleece and said he was going to leave it out all night. In the morning, if the fleece was wet but the ground round about it was dry, he would know that God was going to help him. So he put the fleece out and in the morning it was just as he had said - the fleece was wet but the ground was dry.

So now Gideon was ready to fight the Midianites...

Actually no, he wasn't...

He was still pretty scared, so he said to God, "Please don't be angry with me but let me do one more test. I'll put the fleece out again tonight and this time I want the fleece to be dry but the ground to be wet. If that happens, I'll know you want me to lead the Israelites to fight against the Midianites." That night it happened just as Gideon had asked. The fleece was dry but the ground all around it was soaking wet.

Gideon knew God was with him and he wanted him to lead the people, so he got an army together - 32000 men in all.

(Tell all the rest of the children they can be in the army. If you have a very small group, you could use the images from additional document: Soldiers to represent the army. Use the seven sheets full of soldiers to represent the army and keep the final sheet with just two soldiers for later.)

They started to travel out to meet the Midianites but then God spoke to Gideon. He said, "Gideon, you have far too many men in your army. If I let this whole army fight the Midianites, then the Israelites will boast about their strength and think they won the battle all by themselves. Tell the people, "If anyone is scared to fight, he can go home."

Gideon wasn't too sure about this idea but he asked the people how many of them were scared to fight. 22000 said they were scared and went off home, leaving only 10000. So that's less than a third of the army left!

(Send the majority of the children from the army back to sit down or take away five sheets of soldiers if you are using the pictures to leave only two sheets.)

The men who were left got ready to fight but then God spoke to Gideon again. "You've still got too many people. Take the men down to the river for a drink of water."

So Gideon did and God got him to split them into 2 groups - the ones who lay down and drank straight out of the river and the ones who scooped the water up in their hands to drink it. Only 300 men scooped the water up with their hands and God said to Gideon, "That's your army. I'll help you defeat

the Midianites with those 300 men."

(Choose two or three people to be in army. Send the other children to sit down. If you are using the pictures, replace the two sheets of soldiers with the final sheet showing two individual soldiers.)

That night, God spoke to Gideon and said, "If you still feel afraid to attack, go to the Midianite camp and listen to what they are saying."

So Gideon went to the edge of the camp and went up to one of the tents where he heard two of the Midianites talking.

(Get the children playing the Midianites to read their lines.)

Midianite 1: "I had a dream that a loaf of barley bread came tumbling into our camp. It hit a tent and knocked it flat."

Midianite 2: "That can only mean one thing - God is going to help Gideon and the Israelites to defeat us."

Gideon rushed back to the Israelite camp and shouted, "Get up! God will give us the victory!" The men from the army got up and they each were given a ram's horn and a clay jar. *(Give out rams' horns to the children in the army.)* They surrounded the Midianite camp and, when Gideon gave the signal, they smashed their clay jars and they blew their horns and shouted, "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!" *(You could get all the children to join in with the shout.)*

The Midianites rushed out of their tents in a panic and God confused them and made them fight against one another. Most of the Midianites were killed and those who weren't ran away, terrified, so amazingly God helped the Israelites and they didn't even need to fight to win the battle!

▶ God's Story Video

You will need: equipment to play video

If you prefer not to use a drama to tell the story, you could use this video which summarises Gideon's story in around four minutes: youtu.be/U68clMZSgvQ



REFLECT & RESPOND

▶ Reflection

Talk together:

How do you think Gideon felt about his task of leading the Israelites? What signs are there that he might have been a bit scared at certain points?

Why do you think God kept asking him to cut down his army?

God wanted Gideon to trust him and to realise that when he won the battle it was because God was helping him, not because he had a great army. Gideon was pretty scared and at times he seems like quite a weak character, but God was with him and helped him to succeed.

Read out 2 Corinthians 12:9: "My grace is all you need, for my power is greatest when you are weak." (GNT)

This is something God said later in the Bible to a man called Paul, and it makes a lot of sense.

Gideon was in a situation where he knew he couldn't do it by himself, but he needed God's help. He asked for help and trusted God and as a result he was able to take on a big challenge and see God helping him. He was stronger than he could ever have been on his own because God was helping him.

The Israelites also had a problem they couldn't fix for themselves - the problem of sin. They didn't always realise that they were weak and that they needed

God's help. Often they would try to sort things out for themselves and the results were not good.

It's the same for us. Sometimes we have problems - situations where we feel weak, challenges that seem too big and we can't do it by ourselves. There's also the problem of sin which none of us can fix by ourselves, but God has dealt with that problem by sending Jesus to die, as we learned at Easter. God also has power to help us in other situations where we feel weak.

When we realise that we are weak and that we can't do things by ourselves, that is when we can ask God to help us and see how strong he is.

Think about situations where you feel weak. Maybe you struggle with something in school or getting on with someone in your family or in your class, or maybe you struggle to keep your temper or because there's something you are really scared of.

We're all different in many of the things we struggle with, but all of us struggle with sin.

Lead the children in prayer, asking God to help and show his strength in situations where we are weak.



ADDITIONAL IDEAS

▶ Rams' Horn Craft

You will need: cardboard, sellotape, scissors, Bible verses (from additional document: Bible Verses), glue sticks, felt pens

You could get the children to make rams' horns to use as part of the drama. They could make the horns at the start of the session by rolling a sheet of cardboard diagonally and sticking it with tape. If they wish, they could decorate it with felt pens.

Then, after the story, they could stick on the Bible verse (2 Corinthians 12:9) and take it home as a reminder of the story.

▶ Stone Decorating

You will need: stones, permanent markers

The children could decorate stones with something to remind them of the story. It could be a picture, or it could be a single word like "Strength" or "Help".

Encourage them to take it home and put it somewhere they will see it regularly to remind them of God's strength in their weakness.

▶ Song: I Can Do All Things - Jim Bailey

You will need equipment to play music

This song ties in well with the theme for today: youtu.be/y6Fb1vxlyVM