



# Trust

GOD PROVIDED VICTORY AND BROUGHT HIMSELF GLORY  
THROUGH GIDEON'S ARMY.

**Scripture Passage: Judges 7:1-8,19-23    Memory Verse: Judges 7:2**

In a culture (including our churches) obsessed with big numbers, where quantity often supersedes quality, it's hard to imagine God downsizing in a plan for victory. And yet that's exactly what takes place in this session. As Gideon learned how to trust God more, the Lord continued to provide new opportunities for him to grow in his faith.

Whereas God wants to include human beings in His work, He also wants it clearly understood that He is the only One who does the saving. As a result, all the glory belongs to Him. At every turn in his story, Gideon found that God had a plan, and he needed to trust that plan—even when it didn't make sense.

As you prepare for this session, reflect on the times that God has led you safely through your battles and struggles, perhaps using strategies you weren't expecting. Thank Him for these moments, and ask Him to help you trust Him more in the future because of what He has done for you in the past. Ask Him to guide you in leading the adults in your Bible study so they can see Him as He really is.



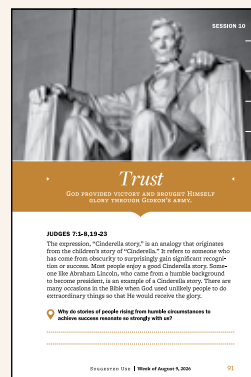
## **Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training**

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The expression, “Cinderella story,” is an analogy that originates from the children’s story of “Cinderella.” It refers to someone who has come from obscurity to surprisingly gain significant recognition or success. Most people enjoy a good Cinderella story. Someone like Abraham Lincoln, who came from a humble background to become president, is an example of a Cinderella story. There are many occasions in the Bible when God used unlikely people to do extraordinary things so that He would receive the glory. (PSG, p. 91)

**Why do stories of people rising from humble circumstances to achieve success resonate so strongly with us?**



## Understand the Context (Judges 7:1–12:15)

A key kingdom principle confirmed throughout Scripture is that God delights in accomplishing His will through His selected servants. It’s not as though He needs our help. After all, creation and redemption were carried out through the collective work of the Trinity.

Yet, when it comes to advancing His kingdom, God has included the crown jewel of His creation, those crafted in His image. In general, He takes pleasure in calling those who are relatively unknown, least likely, or unheralded.

That certainly rang true in the era of the judges. From approximately 1350-1050 BC, God raised up a slate of twelve leaders—mostly from obscurity—to gain victory over Israel’s enemies.

Gideon proved to be one of the more significant judges in the group. Yet, he didn’t start out that way. The youngest member of one of the weakest families in his tribe (Manasseh), Gideon had done nothing to distinguish himself before God called him. In fact, when the Lord did come calling, Gideon was hiding from the Midianites, trying to gather enough food to stay alive.

It’s not always the most famous or most talented people who make the biggest impact in the kingdom. Plenty of talented servants have fallen by the wayside, victims of their own foibles.

Trust matters most. We enter into a relationship with Christ based on trust. We thrive in that relationship through trust as well. Someone once said, “there’s no limit to what a person

can accomplish, as long as they don’t care who gets the credit.” Filtering that through a kingdom perspective, we can say that “there’s no limit to what God can do through a person who cares most about giving Him all the credit.” As Gideon learned, giving God the glory is what matters most.

God did lead Gideon and Israel to a miraculous victory over the Midianites (Judg. 7:1–8:21). But soon after that triumph, readers see the cycle of sin return. Gideon refused to be made a king, noting that God alone was Israel’s true Ruler. Yet, he requested gold from the people to make an ephod (8:22-27; see Ex. 28:6-14). Gideon placed the ephod in his hometown of Ophrah, indicating that he wanted people to remember his role in their deliverance. It did not take long for this ephod to become an idol. Sadly, Gideon’s later life focused more on himself than on God. The people followed his example by returning to idolatry.

Abimelech, Gideon’s son, continued this downward spiral of his father, taking on the role of a king. Eventually, his ambition led to his downfall. Another judge, Jephthah, followed a similar and devastating path. Meanwhile, Israel continued to struggle with enemies, including the Ammonites and the Philistines.

**As you read Judges 7:1-8, 19-23, identify how Israel continued its downward spirals of unfaithfulness to the Lord. (PSG, p. 92)**

# ENGAGE



**PREPARE:** Prior to the group time, move the colored circles to the appropriate places on **Pack Item 2** (Poster: *Outlines of Joshua, Judges, Ruth*) and **Pack Item 5** (Map: *The Judges of Israel*). Make copies of **Pack Item 9** (Handout: *Praying Scripture in Joshua, Judges, Ruth*).

## INTRODUCE:

Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 91 of the PSG. Lead a brief discussion of “Cinderella stories.” Allow adults to share times they have seen a “Cinderella story” take place.

## DISCUSS:

**Why do stories of people rising from humble circumstances to achieve success resonate so strongly with us?** (PSG, p. 91)

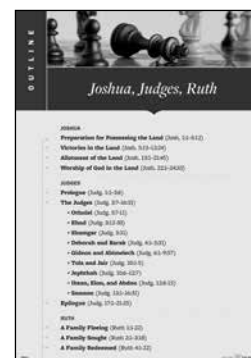
## REVIEW:

Direct attention to **Pack Item 2** (Poster: *Outlines of Joshua, Judges, Ruth*). Highlight Gideon on the list of judges. Remind adults about God’s call of Gideon from the previous session. Explain that Gideon’s story starts well, but ends with the same cycle of sin that plagues Israel throughout Judges:

*Judges 7:1–8:21 recounts Gideon’s victory over Midian. He began with thirty-two thousand men, but God reduced the number to three hundred. This was to ensure that Israel knew the victory was by God’s power, not their own strength. In the aftermath of victory over Midian, the Israelites wanted to make Gideon king. But he refused, saying God would be their king (Judg. 8:22-23). Though there was peace in Israel for forty years until Gideon died, Gideon himself led all of Israel to worship an idol in his hometown. When Gideon died the Israelites began worshipping the Baals again (8:24-32). (PSG, p. 92)*

## TRANSITION:

Gideon’s call was unlikely; but, as we’ll see today, the way God provided deliverance for the Israelites was even more unlikely.



## Group Activity Option

### Music

Play either “Battle Belongs” by Phil Wickham or “The Battle Belongs to the Lord” by Jamie Owens-Collins. After the song, discuss the meaning of the lyrics. Ask: **What makes it difficult to trust the Lord with the battles we face today?** Encourage adults to learn more about trusting God through their study of Gideon and his army.

## Too Many (Judg. 7:1-3)

**1** Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the troops who were with him, got up early and camped beside the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them, below the hill of Moreh, in the valley. **2** The LORD said to Gideon, “You have too many troops for me to hand the Midianites over to them, or else Israel might elevate themselves over me and say, ‘I saved myself.’ **3** Now announce to the troops, ‘Whoever is fearful and trembling may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.’” So twenty-two thousand of the troops turned back, but ten thousand remained.

**(v. 1)** Three significant events took place to confirm Gideon’s call in Judges 6. First, Gideon built an altar to the Lord. Once he had offered a young goat and unleavened bread on the altar, fire came down from heaven to consume the offering. The angel also extended a word of peace, assuring Gideon that he would not die (Judg. 6:23). In response, he built an altar there.

Next, Gideon tore down Baal’s altar. Per God’s instructions, Gideon offered a second offering, bravely tearing down a pagan altar and building one for the Lord in its place (vv. 26-27). Not surprisingly, this put Gideon’s life in danger. However, his father intervened and convinced the Baal worshipers that any real deity could “plead his own case” (v. 31). This earned Gideon the name **•Jerubbaal**, which means “let Baal contend.”

Finally, Gideon asked God for a sign. He wanted one last piece of assurance that God was truly behind this call and would fulfill His promises. He began by placing a fleece outside. This is the only mention of a fleece in the Old Testament and likely described a patch of sheep’s wool left over from a recent shearing.

In this test, Gideon asked God to make the fleece wet with dew, while the ground around it remained dry. After God responded to that request, Gideon reversed the request, asking the Lord to keep the fleece dry, while the ground got wet (vv. 36-40). Again, God miraculously complied with the request.

With both signs confirmed, Gideon **got up early and camped** with the **troops** he had assembled from the tribes of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali (6:35). The Israelites took a spot beside **the spring of Harod**, also known as the “fountain of trembling.” This spring was situated near the **hill of Moreh**, slightly north-east of Ophrah. Meanwhile, the Midianites were camped to the **north of them**. They were settled in the **valley**, just below Moreh.

**(vv. 2-3)** Gideon’s faith would face an even greater test. Though massively outnumbered already, God said that Gideon had **too many troops** for the battle. The phrase **for me to hand the Midianites over to them** again highlighted God’s role in bringing the victory to His people.

The Lord wanted to make sure His people wouldn’t mistakenly think they defeated the Midianites in their own strength. He stated clearly that the Israelites would have no reason to **elevate themselves**. Later in Israel’s history, David echoed this theme, noting that while some trusted chariots and horses, God’s people should take pride only in His name (Ps. 20:7).

To downsize the army, God ordered Gideon to allow anyone who was **fearful and trembling** to go home. As a result, **twenty-two thousand** soldiers left, while **ten thousand remained**. Gideon must have been shocked, especially since Midian’s army wasn’t shrinking.

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### Praying Scripture

#### Judges 7:2

Spend time praying Scripture using Judges 7:2. Read the verse, then respond to these questions:

- How does God reveal Himself in this verse?
- How should I respond to what He reveals?

*Example:* Thank God for walking with you and providing victories in your life. Ask Him to help you avoid the temptation to trust your own strength and commit to giving Him the glory in every circumstance.

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## EXPLORE Judges 7:1-3



### CONTEXT:

**APPLICATION POINT:** Believers dishonor God when they seek the glory that belongs to Him alone.

Direct attention to **Pack Item 5** (*Map: The Judges of Israel*) and show the location of events in Judges 7. Use information from Joshua 7:1 in the Leader Guide (p. 112) to summarize how Gideon tested the Lord with a fleece. Note that by Joshua 7, Gideon was committed to following God's call.

### ASK:

**When has anyone ever asked you to do something that seemed outrageous and not doable?**

### READ:

**Invite a volunteer to read aloud Judges 7:1-3** as the group listens for the unexpected directions from God.

### DISCUSS:

On the board or a large sheet of paper, write 32,000. Explain that this was the original number of fighting men Gideon had recruited from the tribes of Israel. Lead a brief discussion about why God felt that number was too big, especially considering the size of the Midianite army. Summarize this content from pages 93-94 of the PSG:

“The Lord told [Gideon] he had too many troops for the Lord to give the Israelites a victory over the Midianites. Certainly, the Lord could do whatever He wanted to do. The issue was not the Lord’s ability but Israel’s misplaced trust and lack of humility. The Lord knew that if He gave Israel the victory with their thirty-two thousand troops . . . then Israel would boast and take credit for the amazing victory instead of recognizing that it was God who did it for them. Therefore, the Lord instituted a two-pronged Israelite army reduction plan. The first stage was straightforward. God told Gideon to announce to his troops that whoever was fearful and trembling at the prospect of fighting the Midianites could leave.”

### ASK:

**In what ways might we try to do God’s work by our own might and for our glory?** (PSG, p. 94)

### PRAY:

Distribute copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Joshua, Judges, Ruth*) and encourage adults to use Judges 7:2 as a prayer prompt as on page 112 of the Leader Guide.

### TRANSITION:

*Gideon lost two thirds of his soldiers in a matter of minutes. The worrisome discrepancy between the armies had grown larger—but God wasn’t done yet.*



## Still Too Many (Judg. 7:4-8)

**4** Then the LORD said to Gideon, “There are still too many troops. Take them down to the water, and I will test them for you there. If I say to you, ‘This one can go with you,’ he can go. But if I say about anyone, ‘This one cannot go with you,’ he cannot go.” **5** So he brought the troops down to the water, and the LORD said to Gideon, “Separate everyone who laps water with his tongue like a dog. Do the same with everyone who kneels to drink.” **6** The number of those who lapped with their hands to their mouths was three hundred men, and all the rest of the troops knelt to drink water. **7** The LORD said to Gideon, “I will deliver you with the three hundred men who lapped and hand the Midianites over to you. But everyone else is to go home.” **8** So Gideon sent all the Israelites to their tents but kept the three hundred troops, who took the provisions and their rams’ horns. The camp of Midian was below him in the valley.

**(vv. 4-5)** It’s hard to think about large numbers hindering the work of God. After all, Billy Graham preached to more than 200 million people in his lifetime. Plus, we love seeing churches grow, because those numbers represent real people.

Yet, numbers also can become an idol. God saw that danger in regard to Gideon’s army. Even after two thirds of the soldiers went home because they were afraid, God still told Gideon that he had **too many troops**. So, the Lord devised an unusual plan to reduce the number even more.

God told Gideon to lead his soldiers **down to the water** so He could **test them**. This probably refers to the spring of Harod mentioned in verse 1. While Gideon would give the instructions, the Lord made it clear that He would make the ultimate decision on whether **this one can go** and **this one cannot go**.

The test involved how a soldier drank from the pool. God said a man who **laps water . . . like a dog** should be separated from one who **kneels to drink**. Some scholars suggest that this was a test of vigilance. Those who put their faces in the water to drink could not watch for the enemy as well as those who cupped the water in their hands. Since the writer did not explain God’s reasons, though, this is speculative. The emphasis was placed on God’s glory.

**(vv. 6-7)** Whatever the case, God pared Gideon’s army once again. Of the ten thousand soldiers who did not go home out of fear, 9,700 **knelt** and lapped water like a dog. Only **three hundred**, less than one percent of the original thirty-two thousand, **lapped with their hands to their mouths**.

Finally, God had Gideon and the Israelite army where He wanted it. The ultimate victory would guarantee that He got the glory. Even with

the troop count downsized again, God promised **I will deliver you**. Regardless of the massive army gathered in the valley, the Lord would **hand the Midianites over to you**. God would do what needed to be done with **three hundred men who lapped**. The rest could **go home**.

Throughout Scripture, God’s promise to fight for His people is not uncommon. God told Moses that He would bring Israel out of Egyptian slavery by the power of His hand (Ex. 6:6-9). Later, He assured the Israelites that He would fight their wars and give them the victory (Deut. 20:4). This promise was renewed for Joshua before Israel’s second battle against Ai (Josh. 10:8). Battles continue to this day, yet God has never stopped fighting for His people (2 Cor. 1:10).

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### Key Doctrine

#### God the Father

God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace. (See Psalm 47:8; Job 42:2.)

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**(v. 8)** The Bible does not say how Gideon felt about the reduction of troops. It just highlights His obedience, sending the majority of his army **to their tents**. The rest got ready for the upcoming battle. The three hundred remaining soldiers took their **provisions** and their **rams’ horns** and moved out from the spring. Meanwhile, the enemy awaited them **in the valley**.

## EXPLORE Judges 7:4-8



### READ:

**APPLICATION POINT:** Believers need to trust that God's way of doing things is always best.

**Call for a volunteer to read aloud Judges 7:4-8**, directing the group to listen to how God downsized Gideon's army again.

### ASK:

**When have you been part of a "trust fall" exercise? What is the purpose of this kind of activity?**

### DISCUSS:

Allow adults who have been part of a trust fall to share their experiences. Compare the feelings of a trust fall to what Gideon may have been feeling as his men drank the water.

### RECAP:

Review what happened after God told Gideon that he still had too many troops:

*Gideon obeyed the Lord and brought his troops to the water. God instructed him to separate the men into two groups based on how they drank from the spring. Everyone who lowered themselves and lapped the water with his tongue like a dog was put in one group. The ones who knelt, scooped the water up, and drank it from their cupped hands were to be separated into a second group. Of the ten thousand men who drank at the spring, only three hundred scooped up the water and drank it from cupped hands. The Lord told Gideon He would save Israel using these three hundred men. (PSG, p. 95)*

### SHARE:

Note that in a short amount of time, God had reduced Gideon's army by more than ninety-nine percent. Emphasize that He had put them in a position where they had no choice but to trust Him and to give Him the glory for the victory He provided.

### ASK:

**When have you had to trust God despite not understanding what He was doing or asking?** (PSG, p. 96)

### Group Activity Option

#### Bible Skill

Gideon had his doubts when God said He would deliver Israel through him. He also may have wondered why God so drastically reduced his army. Prayerfully consider times when you had questions about what God was doing. **How do you tend to respond when God doesn't make sense in your life? What can you do to trust Him more fully?**

## Just Right (Judg. 7:19-23)

**19** Gideon and the hundred men who were with him went to the outpost of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch after the sentries had been stationed. They blew their rams' horns and broke the pitchers that were in their hands. **20** The three companies blew their rams' horns and shattered their pitchers. They held their torches in their left hands and their rams' horns to blow in their right hands, and they shouted, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!" **21** Each Israelite took his position around the camp, and the entire Midianite army began to run, and they cried out as they fled. **22** When Gideon's men blew their three hundred rams' horns, the LORD caused the men in the whole army to turn on each other with their swords. They fled to Acacia House in the direction of Zererah as far as the border of Abel-meholah near Tabbath. **23** Then the men of Israel were called from Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh, and they pursued the Midianites.

**(vv. 19-20)** Later that night, the Lord again guaranteed a win, giving Gideon some extra encouragement. Sneaking down to the enemy's camp, Gideon overheard two Midianites talking about a dream. In a nutshell, these soldiers recognized that God was going to use Gideon to crush their army (Judg. 7:9-15).

Gideon divided his soldiers into three groups to surround the Midianite camp, but God again sent Him in an unexpected direction. Instead of swords and spears, each man got a rams' horn trumpet, an empty pitcher, and a torch. Then, Gideon told them to follow his lead in blowing their horns and smashing their pitchers (7:16-18).

The **middle watch** likely refers to a time around midnight, when all but the Midianite **sentries** would be asleep. But Gideon's army disrupted the stillness. Coordinating their actions, all three companies **blew their rams' horns and broke the pitchers**. Holding their torches, they also cried out, **A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!**

In considering the impact this upheaval would have on Midian, let's start with the noise. The sound of three hundred horns and the screams of three hundred men must have been daunting, especially if most of the army was asleep. Next, think about the flames from three hundred torches. This would have lit up the night and disoriented the enemy.

Unorthodox battle plans are not unprecedented with God. In Joshua 6, God led Joshua's army to attack Jericho by marching around the city, blowing rams' horns, and yelling.

Often in Scripture, God's people emerge victorious when the enemy turned on themselves. That's exactly what happened to the Midianites.

Once God's army attacked, the enemy imploded. The Lord caused Gideon's enemies to turn on each other and destroy themselves with swords. God had done exactly what He said He would do.

**(vv. 21-22)** While each member of Israel's army **took his position** around Midian's camp, they didn't need to do a thing because God had everything under control. Any Midianites who escaped the slaughter **began to run**, crying out in fear as **they fled**. The writer of Judges noted that they headed toward **Acacia House in the direction of Zererah as far as the border of Abel-meholah near Tabbath**. Although the exact location of these places is unknown, the understanding is they fled east, across the Jordan River.

**(v. 23)** Earlier, Gideon had recruited soldiers from several tribes (Judg. 6:35), but God had sent most of them home. Now, men from **Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh** joined in the battle and **pursued the Midianites**. It is not clear if God had given Gideon His blessing to call these new men, possibly from those rejected earlier, into the battle.

It is possible that Gideon, caught up in the overwhelming triumph, called these men back into service despite God's directions. The final verses of chapter 7 note that he also called for volunteers from Ephraim, a tribe that did not come as part of Gideon's original call for help in chapter 6.

The Lord fulfilled His word and gave Israel an incredible victory. He still stands ready to go into any battle for His people. The size of the enemy means nothing when we remember the size of our God.

## EXPLORE Judges 7:19-23



### READ:

**APPLICATION POINT:** Believers should pray for God to do what only He can do.

**Call for a volunteer to read Judges 7:19-23**, leading the group to listen for how God miraculously delivered the Israelites from the Midianites.

### RECAP:

Review God's "battle plan" for Israel and its results:

*[Gideon] divided his men into three groups of one hundred in each company. He equipped each man with a ram's horn in one hand and an empty pitcher with a torch inside of it in the other hand. They had dispersed themselves all around the camp. . . . First, they blew their horns. Second, they smashed their jars. Third, they held up their lit torches that had been concealed in the jars. In a normal nighttime military maneuver, only someone at the front of a company would have been carrying a lit torch. Gideon's three hundred men appeared to be three hundred companies surrounding the Midianites. Finally, they shouted, "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!" . . . There was so much chaos that the Lord caused all of the Midianites to begin attacking each other. (PSG, pp. 97-98)*

### ASK:

**How should knowing that God acts in unpredictable ways impact how we live?** (PSG, p. 98)

### DISCUSS:

Lead the group to discuss how these events and actions would bring God glory. Encourage them to consider how they can allow God to move and do things His way in their lives.

### Group Activity Option

#### Object Lesson: Flashlight

Prior to class, obtain a small, high-powered flashlight. While the lights are on, display the flashlight. Ask: **Does this seem like a significant source of light right now? Why?** Turn on the flashlight, then cover it with your hand. Enlist a volunteer to turn off the lights to make the room as dark as possible. Lift your hand and note how a small light can illuminate an entire room. Explain that Gideon had three hundred men equipped with torches. Discuss what that might have looked like and felt like when all those men broke their jars and shouted at the top of their lungs.

## CHALLENGE

### SUMMARIZE:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 99 of the *Personal Study Guide*:

- *Believers dishonor God when they seek the glory that belongs to Him alone.*
- *Believers need to trust that God's way of doing things is always best.*
- *Believers should pray for God to do what only He can do.*

### REFLECT:

Lead the group to discuss their main takeaways from each point. Encourage them to read and reflect on the first question set on page 99 of the PSG. Urge them to list two or three ways they can glorify God in the margin of their PSG.

### DISCUSS:

Guide the group to discuss the second question set on page 99 of the PSG. Allow volunteers to share what makes trusting God so hard sometimes. Remind them that God often works in ways we don't expect, so we need to trust Him.

### PRAY:

Enlist a volunteer to read Joshua 7:2 aloud. Point out that this is the memory verse for this session. Challenge them to continue using **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Joshua, Judges, Ruth*) to pray through this verse during the week. Close the session in prayer, thanking God that His ways of working are always the best ways. Pray that the group would be aware of God's work for His glory around them.

## AFTER THE SESSION

Reinforce the session by sending a text or email to the group. Include the text for Judges 7:2 and ask: ***Where have you seen God at work this week?*** Encourage the group to “reply all” with their responses as a way to encourage one another. Explain that the next session will focus on the final leader mentioned in the book of Judges: Samson. Suggest they read Judges 13–16 to prepare for the session.

## LEADER EXTRAS



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