



Going God's Way | Pastor Brad Williams | 4.5.09

Note: There will not be a Sermon Study Guide for the Easter services April 10-12. We encourage you to plan on enjoying a time of celebration and fellowship with your group that week! Think food. ☺

A. Fellowship Time (10-15 minutes)

1. Chitchat. Perhaps offer coffee, tea, or a cold drink with some snacks.
2. Pray (or invite someone to pray) to open the discussion.

B. Review Time (Read the summary below to the group: 5-10 minutes)

We live in a culture that wants instant gratification, and that kind of thinking can trickle down to our relationship with God. Life is like a vending machine full of choices, and navigating those choices isn't always easy -- even if you're a person of faith. We want God to work like a vending machine: we do our part, and He does His. But when our circumstances don't work out, we pound on the machine. We assume God has abandoned us or He doesn't care or if He does care, He's made it too difficult for us to figure out. The result can be frustration, discouragement, and distance from God. We need to learn the difference between going our way and going God's way, the difference between a vending machine faith and a relational faith.

1. God's way is the best way.

[Read **Judges 6:1-10** together.] The Israelites were commanded to drive out their enemies, but they did not and they even went as far as taking on their customs and worshiping their gods. As a result, they lived under their oppression, so God sent judges to get Israel back on the right track. One of them was Gideon. **Judges 6:11-12** continues: *"The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, 'The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.'" Gideon didn't feel like a mighty warrior, hiding out in the winepress -- and he didn't believe the Lord was with him. He responds in **Judges 6:13**: *"But sir... if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, 'Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the Lord has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian."'* Despite Gideon's accusation, God had not abandoned His people. They had disobeyed and wandered away from God. Just because we're not getting what we want doesn't mean that God is not with us. The question is whether or not we are with God.*

2. We need to do our part.

Since God's way is the best way, we, like the Israelites, need to make a change if we want the life God offers. **Judges 6:25-27** continues: *"That same night the Lord said to [Gideon], 'Take the second bull from your father's herd, the one seven years old. Tear down your father's altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. Then build a proper kind of altar to the Lord your God on the top of this height. Using the wood of the Asherah pole that you cut down, offer the second bull as a burnt offering.' So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the Lord told him."'* Gideon realized God was with him and the things in his life that contradicted their relationship needed to change. Gideon did his part: he obeyed what God told him to do. Like Gideon, we need to ask ourselves, "If Jesus showed up at my house or job, what would I need to change?" If we're not dealing with the basic things God has asked us to do, we shouldn't be frustrated with God over what He's not doing. If we want the life God offers, we have to do our part.

God instructed Gideon to gather an army to fight against Israel's enemies. Then The Lord said him in **Judges 7:2-3**: *“You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her, announce now to the people, “Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.” ’ So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained.”* But God didn't stop there. He whittled the army to just three hundred men. Gideon had to jump through God's hoops because obedience was an issue. Each experience was a step of obedience. Sometimes God asks us to do something that goes against conventional wisdom or doesn't make sense simply because we need to learn to obey. That's our part, and then God will do His. *Later* in our time together to help us diagnose possible sources for our own problems, we'll discuss these questions:

- What have I added or subtracted from my life?
- What am I doing that I know I shouldn't be?
- What am I not doing that I know I should be doing?

3. Let God do His part.

Picking up in **Judges 7:19-22**, we read: *“Gideon and the hundred men with him reached the edge of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just after they had changed the guard. They blew their trumpets and broke the jars that were in their hands. The three companies blew the trumpets and smashed the jars. Grasping the torches in their left hands and holding in their right hands the trumpets they were to blow, they shouted, ‘A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!’ While each man held his position around the camp, all the Midianites ran, crying out as they fled. When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the Lord caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords. The army fled. . . .”* Gideon and his tiny army defeated their enemies with trumpets, jars, torches, and shouting. Gideon did his part: he obeyed, and God did His: He gave the Israelites victory. That's the nature of God's redemption. He takes something broken and makes it good. Instead of lives of slavery, he gives us freedom. Every day we have the choice to say, “I'm not going down the instant gratification highway.” If we want our life to work, we need to take every major life issue and run it through all of the possible options and remember God's way is the best way. It may not feel that way instantly, but down the road, we'll look back and have fewer regrets and more joy because it's at the very heart of God to do his best for us.

C. Life Group Questions (select, revise, and add as desired: 20-40 minutes)

1. The people of Israel struggled with obedience to the Lord. We struggle with obedience as well coupled with our cultural desire for “instant gratification.” What's an example from your life of how you have had to set aside instant gratification in order to follow God's way?
2. In order to answer this question—“If Jesus showed up at my house or job, what would I need to change?”—discuss the questions bulleted in Section 2.
3. Following up from those questions, what will it look like in your life this week to actually *believe* God is trustworthy rather than just to *profess* that He is? What actions of faith may look ridiculous in the face of conventional wisdom or rationality? But if you follow through on doing things God's way, what do you envision your life may be like?

D. Personal Application (1-3 Minutes)

This week wrestle with the questions you've just discussed. Do you really believe God is trustworthy, loving, and always with us? Write your responses in your devotional journal.

E. Prayer Time (As a whole group or subgroups of 3-4: 10-15 Minutes)

- Pray that God will help us see areas in our lives where we aren't obedient to Him.
- Also ask Him to help us dream His dreams for our lives and take some risks for expanding His kingdom in our home, workplace, community, or church that require “ridiculous faith.”
- Bring other praises and requests before the Lord that arose through the discussion.