

You Have a Choice: How Will You Prepare to Make It?

Week 2

In the Winepress

When we consider the Old Testament Scriptures as a whole, there seems to be a pattern. God allows trouble because the hearts of His children have turned away from Him. Trouble has work to do and that work is to reveal the condition of the hearts of man.

For You God have tested us; You have refined us, as silver is refined.

You brought us into the nets; You placed distress on our backs.

Psalm 66:10-11

Trouble is not just an Israelite issue. It is a human condition. And it often leads us to unusual places:

It led Moses to the desert tending sheep.

It placed Esther, a Jewish orphan girl, in the highest position in the land.

Trouble drove Gideon to the winepress to thresh wheat.

- To what unusual place has trouble driven you? currently or in the past?
-
-

Unusual places set us up to turn our hearts to God and prepare us to hear what we might miss if we hadn't been stirred to move out of what we call normal. Like a burning bush that is not consumed, our passion begins to burn brightly as trouble continues to do its work in us. But if we're honest, this doesn't bring excitement and it doesn't feel good. In fact, we might find ourselves like Gideon, telling all our trouble to the One who allowed it in the first place.

Some might see Gideon's initial response to God's call as a complaint, and it was. Still, it did not deter the Messenger. Gideon's venting didn't offend God or cause Him to turn away. Instead, it opened the door for Gideon to move past his focus on the trouble, and hear what God had to say.

Follow Gideon's lead and do the same.

Take as long as you need to tell God about your trouble. Lay it all out before Him.

The pain, the hurt and disappointment... The sorrow, grief, and anger...

Empty yourself all out.

Write it down. Read what you wrote out loud to God.

When you've finished your prayer time, return here.

Stacy says,

In the span of a few hours on an ordinary Tuesday morning, we became homeless. Fire burned almost everything we had, and after a long day of sifting through the ashes my husband and I drove in silence to my brother's home where we would live for the next seven months. As we turned into their steep driveway, I couldn't hold back what was in my heart.

I whispered, "I don't want to be here."

Over the months, I've said it to God many times. I don't want to be in this unusual place. I don't want to purchase new furniture or underwear. I don't want to. I don't want to.

I DON'T WANT TO BE HERE!

These six little words have become a prayer for me. When I'm honest with God about my feelings, He is faithful to step in and help me regain an eternal perspective.

In this world you will have trouble. But take heart, I have overcome the world.
Jesus (John 16:33)

Finding Our Place in the Story: Identifying the Pattern

If God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow, and if He's telling a larger, grander story -- a Metastory -- then He probably has a pattern for dealing with His people despite the era in which they live. The stories God recorded for us help us know who He is and how He relates to us. When we study the Bible, getting to know God should be our primary focus.

Consider what we've learned from Gideon's story:

In this world, we have trouble.

Trouble brings us to unusual places.

Passion stirs in our hearts for redemption, restoration, and resurrection.

We pour out our hearts to God.

We hear His call.

Now, can we find this same pattern in the lives of others in Scripture? Let's look at Moses and Esther to see what we can identify.

Read Exodus 1-4

What's the trouble?

What unusual place is Moses in?

What passion is beginning to stir in Moses?

How did Moses pour out his heart with God?

What call did Moses hear?

Read Esther 1-4

Identify the trouble.

What unusual place is Esther in?

What passion is beginning to stir in Esther?

How did Esther pour out her heart?

What call did she hear?

What about you?

Look at your life – past or present – to see if God’s pattern of calling can be found.

What trouble do you find yourself in?

What unusual place has it driven you to?

What passion are you sensing inside yourself?

How are you pouring out your heart to God?

What call do you hear?

Faith Responds

Moses’s, Esther’s and Gideon’s stories follow a similar pattern. One we can use in our lives to recognize when God is calling us. However, they each responded to God’s call differently. Identify their responses.

Read Exodus 4:18

What is the first thing Moses did after he heard God's call?

Why would Moses ask Jethro his father-in-law for permission to do what he heard God asking him to do?

Read Romans 13:1-2

What does this Scripture say about authority?

Moses responded to God's call by coming under the authority God placed in his life. Jethro took Moses into his family and provided what Moses needed to survive. His father-in-law was the head of the family and Moses saw him as his authority.

Coming under the authority in our lives provides an avenue of confirmation and blessing.

Make a list of the authority God has placed in your life.

How do you feel about asking for their input when it comes to what God is calling you to do?

Has there been a time when you refused to come under authority? What were the results?

Read Esther 4:15-16

How did Esther respond to God's call?

Esther's response was to practice the spiritual disciplines of prayer and fasting, and call her community to do the same.

Is there a time when hearing God's call spurred you to prayer and fasting?

Did you ask others to join you?

If so, what was the result?

Now let's return to Gideon's story.

Read Judges 6:17-18

What was Gideon's response to hearing God's call?

Gideon responded with a request: *If I'm the one You're choosing and You are who I think You are, do me a favor and wait here until I bring You a gift.* At the heart of this request is a step of discernment. Gideon wanted to make sure this was not a figment of his imagination brought on by stress.

What steps of discernment do you take when you believe you have heard from God?

Consider the three responses:

Coming under authority.

Fasting and praying.

Taking steps of discernment.

Which response proves to be the most difficult for you? Why?

Which one is your most natural response?

Which response would you like to put into practice?

Prepare It

Gideon's response to give an offering, a gift to the Lord, is where we will spend the next few sessions. Though this part of his story is only a few verses, there is much to learn about offering our gifts to God.

Read Judges 6:19

Write the verse below.

Take note of what Gideon did before returning to the Messenger.

Gideon didn't run home and grab a valuable item to offer God. Instead, he prepared a meal. This wasn't the pop in the microwave kind of meal, and it wasn't a talent Gideon magically acquired. Gideon's gift was a result of practice, time, and sacrifice.

These three -- Practice. Time. Sacrifice. -- prepare us to give back to God the gifts He has given us.

First, consider **Practice**.

Gideon's gift of a meal feels a bit ordinary. Something he probably had done hundreds of times in his life by this point. In our world today, we tend to focus on gifts as some supernatural talent. The kind that bring fame and fortune like those we see on our screens daily. Gideon took what he practiced in his ordinary daily life and gave it as an offering to God.

Think about your life.

What do you practice in your ordinary days?

How is God calling you to offer to Him what seems ordinary to you?

How do you view gifts or talents? What shift do you need to make when it comes to your perception of defining gifts or talents? yours or someone else's?

Second comes **Time**.

In a world full of quick fixes, fast food, and instant gratification, TIME is a four-letter-word. Yet Gideon took time to prepare this meal. Imagine how Gideon made this meal in the days of Judges. He didn't run to the grocery store and purchase neatly packaged ingredients to cook. He butchered a goat, built a fire, threshed wheat and ground it into flour. By our standards this meal took a lot of time. It's the same with us. Preparing our gifts takes time.

What emotions surface when you think about the time it takes to prepare?

How have you fallen into the culture's way of living life in the "fast" lane? instant gratification?

What would it take for you to slow down in the preparing of your gifts?

Finally, preparing our gifts takes **Sacrifice**.

Consider David's response to Araunah when he wanted to purchase a field to build an altar.

But the king (David) said to Araunah, "No, but I will buy it from you for a price. I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing."

2 Samuel 24:24 ESV (parenthesis added)

Gideon's preparation of the gift he offered the Lord was a sacrifice. Remember the trouble Gideon and his people were facing. Food was scarce. Yet, this was exactly what he offered. And not just a little food, but entire ephah (over half a bushel) of flour.

When you think of the preparation of your gifts, what sacrifices are required?

What resistance in preparing to give (practice, time, sacrifice) do you notice within yourself?

Preparing gifts for the Lord takes practice, time, and sacrifice. The simple truth is preparation is impossible without God. When we follow God's lead in preparing the gift then it becomes an offering. And it costs us something. It cost God something too.

God, the Giver of all good gifts, prepared everything for us. At this very moment, He is still at work preparing our eternal home, and through the sacrifice of His Son on the cross we have a way back home.

This truth alone inspires us to give a gift every Believer has the ability to give. The gift of praise and thanksgiving.

Visio Divina: A Prayer Exercise

Visio Divina (Divine Seeing) is a prayer exercise related to Lectio Divina (Divine Reading). It is a form of prayer that uses a visual image to set our minds on God and listen for His response.

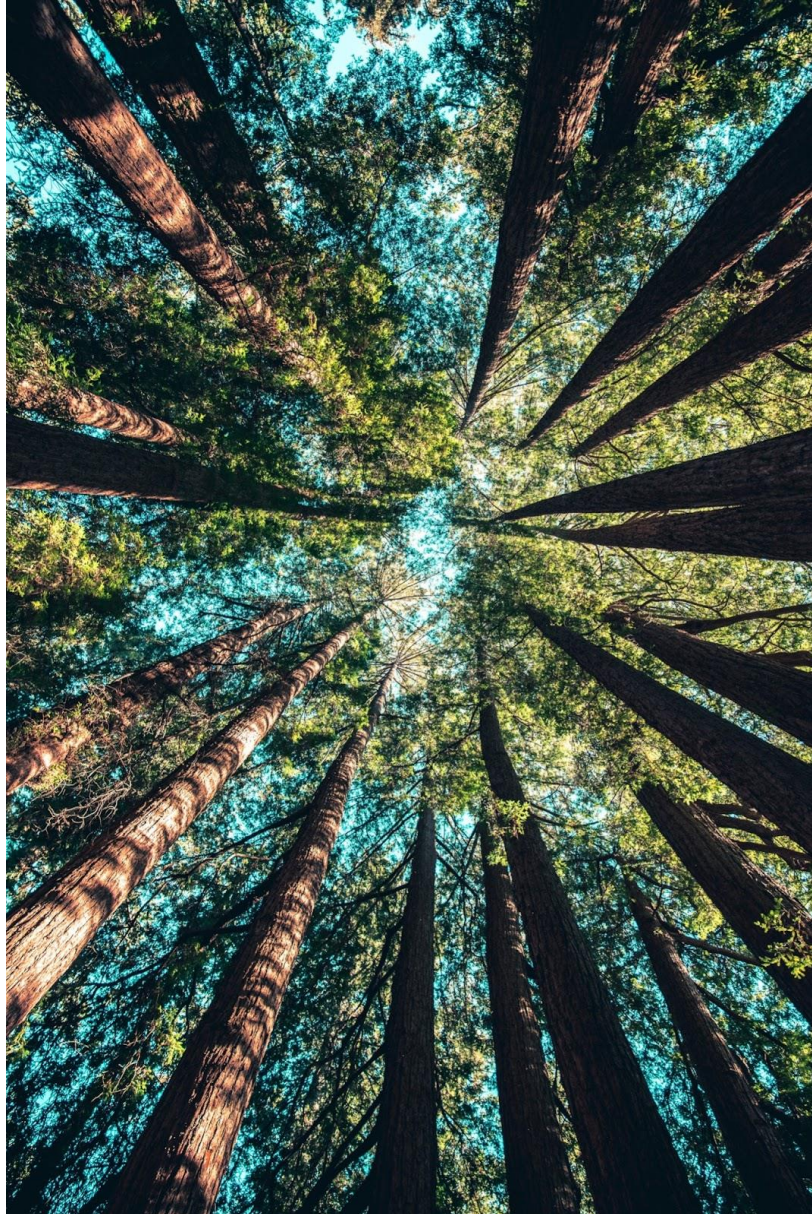
This spiritual practice asks us to focus on an image and prayerfully invite God to open our eyes and hearts to what He sees.

Begin by finding a comfortable place and put the image on the next page in a place where you can see it easily.

Close your eyes. Take a few deep breaths. Clear your thoughts.

Invite Holy Spirit to fill your prayer time with His presence.

When you are ready, look at the visual image you've chosen and ask God to open your eyes and see the way Jesus does.



Prayer Reflection

Where is your eye drawn? what catches your attention?

How do you see with fresh perspective?

What preparation do you imagine God took to give you this gift?

Close your time of prayer with an offering of thanksgiving and praise.