

You are the Offering: Will You Trust God with *It*?
Week 6

In the Winepress

The unusual places trouble drives us become spiritual classrooms. Places where we encounter God in ways we never expected. As we have come alongside Gideon in his unusual place -- threshing wheat in the winepress -- we have learned some things about ourselves and God.

We've identified our need to survive, learned to voice our discomfort to God, and how to wrestle with our emotions.

Once the spiritual air is clear, our ears open, and our hearts are prepared to hear the truth God wants to speak into our lives. The truth of who we are in Christ and how God defines our role in the story He is writing.

The process and purpose of trouble is to bring about **revelation**.

Read Judges 6:1-24

List every revelation that came to light in this passage. To the people of Israel as a whole and to Gideon as an individual.

In the trouble with the Midians, the Israelites came face to face with their weakness and their dependence on God. God revealed His omnipotence and sovereignty in the world by reminding them He delivered them from Egypt AND into the hands of the Midianites. Their sin of rebellion was revealed through the prophet, whose message was evidence of God's presence in it all.

God revealed His presence to Gideon along with his true identity and the role God had for him to play in the Metastory He is writing.

At the end of the passage, what is revealed to Gideon about God? What is Gideon's response to this final revelation?

Which winepress revelation is most important to you in the midst of your troubled place? What are you learning from this revelation?

Seek the Lord while He may be found, call you upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.
Isaiah 5:6-7

Finding Your Place in the Story

One last time, let's journey through what we've learned in this short passage with a test. Fill in the blanks below:

_____ moves us to unusual places where God shows up.

While we are simply trying to survive, we hear a _____ to surrender our own way for His.

Taking a step of discernment we allow God to work through us to _____ our gifts.

Once prepared, the moment comes to _____ them to the Lord.

Standing before the Lord with our gift in hand, we obediently _____ on the Rock.

And finally, we _____. To the full extent of our faith we return to God the gift He has given.

(Answers are on the last page of the homework. How did you do?)

But that's not all, there's more. Return to Judges to remind yourself what happened once Gideon prepared, presented, put down, and poured out his offering before the Lord.

Read Judges 6:21

What happened to Gideon's gift?

Last week we considered how fire represents the Holy Spirit and without pouring out our gifts on the Rock named Jesus, what we do in our own strength is worthless.

For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Romans 8:6-8 ESV

Remember, Gideon prepared the meal to seek confirmation of the call from God and affirmation of his new identity. This is the moment we've been waiting for, the messenger's response to the gift will determine if Gideon moves forward to believe and receive the call God has on his life.

With the tip of His staff, the holy messenger consumed Gideon's offering in a flash of fire.

Merriam-Webster's defines **consume** as *to do away with completely, destroy, use up*.

God took Gideon's gift and did away with it completely, destroying any chance to eat a meal. With one touch Gideon's gift was used up.

What a picture. Possibly something we've not considered. The giving of our gifts to the Lord is a doing away with, completely using up, what we bring before Him.

Imagine your own gift before the Lord. How does it feel to watch as fire consumes it?

What hesitancy do you have?

Read Judges 6:21 once more.

What happened to the messenger?

Not only was Gideon's gift consumed, but as he looked up from the fire, the messenger of the Lord was nowhere to be found. All he prepared, presented, put down and poured out was gone along with the one who called Gideon to save his people from the Midianites.

Scripture doesn't describe Gideon's thought process at this moment, but our experience can help you prepare for what's coming.

Often, after we've poured out what God calls us to pour out, we stand with no evidence of the gift or the call and we begin to wonder: *Did I just see what I think I saw? God just consumed what I gave. God's use of my gift is an awesome miracle! But wait... where did God go? He was just here a moment ago? Why did He leave so quickly? What does all this mean?*

Think about a time you poured out something to the Lord. What was your response during the time shortly after God consumed your gift?

There's a game we've become experts at playing in the hours and days following the pouring out of our gifts. It's a game no one can win, no matter how often you practice, and it can cloud your vision in seeing how God is using you to build the Kingdom. We call it the **Should-a, Would-a, Could-a Game**.

We walk away from the pouring out, and the game begins.

I should-a said that in a different way.

I could-a practiced that song one more time.

If I could do it again, I would-a...

Oh sisters, now is the time to throw this game out. Nothing good comes from self-judgment. Leave the judging up to God, and trust Him to use our imperfect gifts in His perfect ways. If we mess up, God is sure to use that too.

On a scale from one to ten, one being a novice and ten being an olympic champion, how are you at playing this game? What is the basis for your rating?

When do you find yourself most likely to play the game?

Have you ever won a round of this game? Explain.

Read the following **aloud**:

**There is no what if.
There is only what IS.**

When it comes to offering your gifts to God, how does this statement speak to your heart?

Gideon must not have played our game, at least not for long because his response reveals something even more miraculous than a gift being consumed.

But first, let's recall Gideon's initial response to God's call in the winepress in Judges 6:13.

"Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, 'Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian."

Underline the second sentence in the passage above.

Circle the words that reveal what Gideon's faith was based on up to this point.

Think about your own faith. Do you remember a time when your faith/belief was based on something you were told? Explain.

Let's look at Gideon's response after the Lord consumed his offering.

Read Judges 6:22

Look up the word **perceived** and write the definition below.

What is Gideon's faith/belief based on now?

Is there a time in your faith journey when your belief moved from what you heard about God to what you saw for yourself? Explain.

Before Gideon conquered the oppressors or watched God move in miraculous ways to free His people from the Midianites, he claimed, *"I have **seen the Lord face to face!**"* Gideon is blessed with eyes of faith! fresh sight! and all the questioning of his experience faded away.

Gideon has seen the Lord. He is not the only one. Revelation, seeing the Lord, permeates the Scriptures. It forms the plotline within the Metastory. Believers moving from knowledge and understanding to experience. Experience is where we build relationship with the Messiah whose name is Emmanuel, *God With Us*.

Read Matthew 16:13-19

How did the disciples respond to Jesus' question?

How did Peter respond?

Peter saw something the others didn't, and it wasn't due to his own work or giftedness.

How did Peter come to the conclusion?

Peter's revelation from God brought a blessing.

What was the blessing given to Peter?

Jesus' promise that Peter's faith/belief statement is what the church and God's Kingdom would be built on continues today in and through us.

What revelation has God inspired in you throughout this study?

How does God want to use your gifts to build His Kingdom?

Our tendency to forget what we've seen, and the weariness we sometimes feel after the pouring out often leads us to something we call an **Elijah Moment**. You can find Elijah's story in the Old Testament book of 1Kings, but here's a short summary.

At the word of God, the prophet Elijah prophesied a drought in the land of Israel as a consequence for their sin in serving gods other than the One True God. After three years, God told Elijah to return to the king of Israel and He would bring rain to the land. The meeting led to a challenge, not only for the king but for the people: *If the Lord is God, follow Him, but if Baal, then follow him.*

The prophets of Baal were gathered, the altar was built, and the showdown began. When it was all said and done, the prophets of Baal were eliminated, and Elijah was all poured out. God won the day! (1Kings 17-18)

But Elijah, he had a moment... Let's look at what happened next.

Read 1Kings 19:1-4

What drove Elijah to run?

Have you ever felt like Elijah? Can you relate to his prayer: *It is enough, O Lord, take my life...?* Explain.

Many times after pouring out the gifts we are called to give, fear creeps in to keep us focused on self. Somehow, Elijah, in his poured out state, believed one queen was more powerful than the 450 prophets of Baal he had just slaughtered.

From our perspective it seems a bit off, but through experience we've noticed the same thing. Breakthrough comes, we walk away from the battle victorious, and BAM! The next thing we know we are running in fear and fatigue asking God to take us away from this life.

Elijah moments are best avoided when we prepare ourselves in advance. It is not uncommon for us to confess to one another, "I'm having an Elijah moment."

Is there a time you too have experienced an Elijah moment?

How did you move through the fear and continue?

After pouring out our gifts to the utmost of our faith, these are two errors we can fall prey to:

- Playing the **Should-a, Would-a, Could-a Game** – making judgments about what and how we gave our gifts
- Or giving into an **Elijah Moment** – running in fear from the fall out of our pouring out.

Both mindsets keep us from recognizing God's presence in the place we stand in the wake of our obedience.

Complete surrender of our gifts to God and trusting Him to use them for His good and glory takes acceptance. Accepting we've done the best we know how to do, and the rest is up to God.

When you set aside fear and self-judgment, how do you see the Lord in the giving of your gifts?

*[The Lord replied,] "Look among the nations! See! Be astonished! Wonder!
For I am doing something in your days --
You would not believe it if you were told.
Habakkuk 1:5 Amplified Bible*

Palms Down, Palms Up: A Prayer Exercise

Body language has been spoken since the beginning of time, and can tell us a lot about what someone is feeling or thinking. It's part of how we were created to communicate.

Prayer postures are simply the body language of prayer. As children we may have been taught to fold our hands together and bow our heads. There are times we kneel or lie face down on the floor. This week's prayer exercise incorporates our body language into the prayer.

Begin by sitting comfortably in your sacred space.

Focus on your breathing. Breathe in... breathe out.

Center your thoughts on God and place your palms facing up.

Give thanks for the gifts God has given you, and how He is using them in your life.

When you are ready, **turn your hands to where your palms are facing down.**

Inwardly pray and release your concerns about God's call and gifts in you.

Let go of your anxious thoughts, or worry about what may come.

Turn loose of your own expectations and the desire to please man.

Put down the should-a, would-a, could-a game.

Whatever is weighing on your mind... release it.

After several moments of surrender, **turn your palms up** as a symbol of your desire to receive from God.

Pray for your needs in this moment.

Imagine God fulfilling each need by placing it in your open hands.

Spend the final moments of prayer in complete silence.

Allow God's presence to be with you without words. Don't ask for anything. Just be present.

Close your time of prayer with an **Amen**.

Journal your experience.

Fill in the blank answers:

Trouble, call, prepare, present, put it down, pour it out