



RISKY BUSINESS

BY PASTOR SEGUN "SHEGZ" AIYEBUSI

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What's the boldest thing you ever did for God? What's the greatest risk you ever took for the sake of the gospel?

While trying to collect responses for this question, I came across an image online that I think captures one of the boldest moves I've ever seen. (Yes. I'm aware it's a silly photoshopped-goldfish. Just play along).



You have to think about this action from the goldfish's perspective to appreciate the boldness displayed because it has everything to lose if its bold plan doesn't work.

Here's how I see it:

- I see a determined goldfish who is tired of the status quo and is no longer content to live the ordinary life.
- I see a goldfish who refuses to be trapped in a world where he has to wait on others for its daily bread.
- I see a goldfish eager to take some God-Sized risk in order to fulfill its destiny.
- I see a goldfish who has put its trust in Jesus Christ and is willing to believe that His creator in heaven is able to do for it

immeasurably more than all it could ask or imagine, according to God's power that is at work in his tiny fins.

Fine. I'm being ridiculous. But you have to appreciate the possibility of such an act if it ever happened. Right?

Well I hope you do because I'm going to use the goldfish as an illustration for the big idea I want to communicate in this message. Like this fish, how might the trajectory of your life change if you stepped out in faith and pursued a dream or vision God has planted in your heart? How might your life be different if you trusted God and took the big leap from your small glass jar into the big ocean?

In the sixth chapter of Old Testament book of Judges, we read of the story of a small army unit of 300 men who did something incredibly bold because they believed God was with them. In this message, I'm going to zero in on their leader, a man named Gideon. His story and his willingness to obey God is a picture of what happens when we begin praying big prayers and follow through with bold action.

CRISIS CREATES OPPORTUNITIES

This story takes place during a period when the Israelites were ruled by a series of rulers called Judges. The period was also marked by a cycle of disobedience and obedience. By the time we get to the sixth chapter of Judges, the Israelites are in a down cycle of obedience, and this time around things are looking especially bad. Verse 1, "Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites... (3)Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, marauders from Midian, Amalek, and the people of the east would attack Israel, camping in the land and destroying crops as far away as Gaza. They left the Israelites with nothing to eat, taking all the sheep, goats, cattle, and donkeys. (5)These enemy hordes, coming with their livestock and tents, were as thick as locusts; they arrived on droves of camels too numerous to count. And they stayed until the land was stripped bare. 6 So Israel was reduced to starvation by the Midianites. Then the Israelites cried out to the Lord for help." (New Living Translation)

Though all seems lost, we find in scripture time and time again that

God does some of His more dramatic works when the odds are stacked against Him/His people. God always saves for Himself a remnant, a group from which He may select an individual to represent Him. That's exactly what is going to happen in a few verses later.

In verse 11, God sends one of His preeminent angels to pay a visit to an ordinary man named Gideon. The conversation between the angel and Gideon carries some strong encouraging implications. First implication is that YOU may very well be the answer God is preparing to give in response to the needs that have been raised up in prayer by a group you've never met (or are familiar with). I can think of a handful of times when I've prayed for someone else's need and ended up being the one God called to meet that need. So I always tell people, be careful and attentive to what you ask God for, because you might get it!

This conversation between angel and man also provides us with an instruction manual on what it looks like to be used by God in spite of our own shortcomings.

WHEN ANGELS CALL YOU FUNNY NAMES

Listen to how the angel addresses Gideon in verse 12 "When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, "The LORD is with you, MIGHTY WARRIOR." (caps and emphasis mine)

Pretty cool, right? Angels are spiritual warrior beings who have fought beastly demonic creatures and defeated them. So if one ever refers to you as a mighty warrior, you should be proud! Gideon should be proud of this moment.

Unfortunately, his response to the angel's greeting seems to contradict the title the angel just gave him. In verse 17, our "Mr. Mighty Warrior" pretty much spends the first few moments whining about what he isn't, what he doesn't have, and what he hasn't been given. Verse 13 and 15, "...but if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders.the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.....But Lord," Gideon asked, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."

Something else that should strike us as "not-very-mighty-warrior-ish" is the little note in verse 11 that says when the angel showed up, Gideon was "threshing wheat at the bottom of a winepress to hide the grain from the Midianites"

Here's why that should stand out. The work Gideon was doing was not supposed to be done by humans. Cattle did the treading. But their enemies, the Midianites, had invaded their lands and forcefully taken all their livestock. The little grain they had left had to be threaded by hand. To make matters worse, Gideon had to do it in hiding from fear that the Midianites would return to steal his lunch meal. (Yes. Sarcasm).

That's not exactly warrior-like behavior, is it? That would be like an angel showing up in my apartment towards the end of the semester during exam finals, (while I'm binging on Netflix episodes of "24") saying, "Rise up Segun, man of brilliance and wisdom." I'd probably respond with "Uh ... you sure you have the right address?" Gideon probably felt the same way.

Yet, the angel (who dwells in the presence of God) calls him "mighty warrior". We can safely assume God Himself thinks the same of Gideon, and probably instructed the angel to call him so.

There is another profound principle here. When God looks on your life, He doesn't only see you as you are or what your circumstances have caused you to be, He sees who He's destined you to be. God knows the

raw materials He's placed, what He wants to do in and through you with those gifting. But most importantly, He wants you to approach Him boldly in prayer and ask Him to do the impossible in your life.

The story at this point changes as the voice of the angel becomes the voice of God Himself. Verse 14 tells it this way, "The Lord [no longer just the angel speaking] turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?" I'm not going to explain why the voice changes, but there's a detailed explanation at this link (<http://www.gotquestions.org/angel-of-the-Lord.html>) that might explain why "The angel of the Lord" and "The Lord" are used interchangeably.

In response, Gideon pleads with God to give him evidence that He would be with him all the way. God obliges and confirms for Gideon on three occasions that He would if Gideon would put God first. Gideon obeys (verse 25-27).

By the way, if you grew up in church and have at some point read/heard this story, I'll bet you're expecting me to say something about Gideon's "fleece" experiment in verse 36-40.

Sure. I'll say something. Don't do it! God is impressed with faith (Hebrews 11:6). Moving on.

THE AWESOME LOGIC OF GOD

Chapter 7 opens up with the beginning of the battle scene. Verse 12 says "The armies of Midian, Amalek, and the people of the east had settled in the valley like a swarm of locusts. Their camels were like grains of sand on the seashore—too many to count!"

A little later on in the story, we are told that the numbers of the armies that assembled against Gideon and his army was about 120,000. To give you an idea how intimidating this must have been, verse 3 says Gideon had only 32,000 soldiers in his army (by any military standard, that's a tough battle to try and win). But look at what God does next in chapter 7:2-3 "...The Lord said to Gideon, "You have too many warriors with you. If I let all of you fight the Midianites, the Israelites will boast to me that they saved themselves by their own strength. 3 Therefore, tell the people, 'Whoever is timid or afraid may leave this mountain[a] and go home.'" So 22,000 of them went home, leaving only 10,000 who were willing to fight."

If I'm Gideon, I'm probably thinking to myself, "God is my strength. God is my strength. DON'T PANIC! God is my strength. God is MY STRENGTH!!"

But get this. God was still not done with the pruning. Look at verse 4, "But the LORD said to Gideon, "There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there. If I say, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go; but if I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go." When they get to the waterside, God guides Gideon to select only 300 men to head into battle. Yes. You heard right. 300! (And NO they probably didn't look like the chiseled battle-trained bare-chested and oiled up warriors in the movie by the same name!) Remember that these men were in hiding at the beginning of the last chapter?

Whatever the case may be, God says in verse 7, "With the three hundred men ...I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the other men go, each to his own place." So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites to their tents but kept the three hundred, who took over the provisions and trumpets of the others.

Think realistically how scary this was for Gideon. I know we like to

paint so many of our Bible characters as being larger than life, but remember, they were human just like us. Many of them struggled with the same insecurities we struggle with and face similar fears like we face. Gideon was a man of faith, but I have to imagine he had a moment when he looked at all 300 men who God had selected and thought to Himself, “Okay God, I trust you. But you will need to **SHOW UP BIG TIME!!**”

Have you ever had the odds stacked against you? So much so that all you had to lean on was your faith? Or have you ever had to take a risk for God? Perhaps like our goldfish in the beginning, you took a giant leap of faith believing God would meet you in a powerful way?

Gideon is about to experience what a God-sized risk looks like.

Unlike our fish, and unlike normal human risk, this was no risk at all because of the WHO. You see, God (the who) had already gone ahead and given the enemy army nightmares about an incoming army led by Gideon.

That same night, while Gideon was resting with his army of 300 soldiers, God woke him up and told him to sneak up to the edge of where enemy camp to listen to what the guards were saying. Here is

what Gideon heard; starting in verse 13 “...Gideon crept up just as (one of the soldiers on guard was telling his partner) about a dream. The man said, “I had this dream, and in my dream a loaf of barley bread came tumbling down into the Midianite camp. It hit a tent, turned it over, and knocked it flat!” His companion answered, “Your dream can mean only one thing— God has given Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite, victory over Midian and all its allies!”

How awesome is this for Gideon! So here’s a great third lesson/ principle we can pick up from this story. When God calls you to do something risky in His name, understand that He’s already gone ahead of you to set the stage for you.

The Midianites were superstitious people and saw meaning behind everything, especially dreams. By giving the loud mouth guard a nightmare, fear of Gideon spread like wildfire throughout the enemy camp. How strategically awesome is that!

Before Gideon would ever need to lift a finger, God had already caused his enemies to begin struggling with fear. So of course, if Gideon had any hesitations, it was certainly gone now. From verse 15-25, Gideon takes advantage of their

fear. In the middle of the night, he sneaks his men behind enemy lines and at his signal, his soldiers blew a loud horn alerting the enemy that they were about to be attacked. As soon as the Midianites heard the horns, verse 22 says “..the Lord caused the warriors in the Midianites camp to fight against each other with their swords. ... Those who were not killed fled to placesfar away.....”

And just like that. God showed up. 300 townsfolk beat up 120,000 trained fighters.

Here’s what I’m learning to be true; God is more willing to answer our prayers than we are willing to ask. God has things He wants done on earth. He could do it Himself, but in love, He has chosen to work through His people. So He searches. He looks to see if there is anyone full of faith and fully committed to Him. When He finds Him/Her, it’s GO time baby! I believe it’s the same idea 2 Chronicles 16:9 is getting at when it says, “For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support

those whose heart is completely His.” (NASB)

So back to the question I asked at the beginning. What’s something risky God might be calling you to do for Him? What area of your life do you feel like the goldfish in the beginning? Perhaps you’re stepping into a new season where it feels like the odds are stacked against you?

Wherever you are (or feel like you’re being called into), remember that God has already gone ahead of you, and is more eager to work in and through your life than you are willing to ask. “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” **Ephesians 3:20**

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