
LOVING JESUS, LOVING PEOPLE, PLOWING A COUNTER-CULTURE

[Spring Season: April 12 – June 14 | Fall Season: September 27 – December 6]

LEADER DETAILS

- **MAIN TEXT:** Judges 7:1-8:35
- **MAIN IDEA:** Gideon's story shows both the power of dependence on God and the danger of slowly drifting into pride, self-reliance, and false worship.
- **GROWTH FOCUS:** Practice re-directing the conversation away from over-sharing and rabbit trails.
- **ICE-BREAKER:** Just use the first section for Totowa or Ringwood below in the discussion section!

ANNOUNCEMENTS (Full details at: emergence.church/digital-bulletin)

- **Totowa Updates** – The new eKids is open, we are in the temporary auditorium, and we have new service times! **Keep updated on changes here:** <https://emergence.church/totowa-updates>
- **Baptism Weekend – June 4th and 7th – Ringwood and Totowa**
 - **The Why** - Baptism is the way Jesus calls His followers to proclaim their faith in Him. It symbolizes how through faith we die with Christ to our sin, and are raised with Christ to new life in Him. If you are a follower of Jesus and haven't declared that through baptism, now is the time to sign up!
- **College-ish - Mondays in Totowa @ 7:00pm - June 1 – July 6**
 - **The Why** - College-ish is a six-week session for young adults from ages 18-25 to grow, connect, and learn more about Jesus. For those who are staying local as we head towards Fall, the hope is for this to also serve as a bridge into a community group for long-term connection and discipleship.

GETTING STARTED:

- **Pray:** This helps everyone prepare their heads and hearts as you turn to the discussion.
- **Watch Community Extras Video** (length 5:23 – questions from video are included below)

LAST WEEK'S GROWTH STEP FOLLOW-UP:

[Leaders: These follow-ups are meant to offer some accountability while being low-pressure. Keep it casual, "If you were able to try this last week, how did it go?" Sharing is optional; it's always okay to pass.]

- **Outward Action:** Take one courageous step of obedience this week in an area where fear has been holding you back.
- **Inward Prayer:** Meditate on scripture, asking God to renew your mind with His truth and help you see yourself and your circumstances through His eyes.

SERMON DISCUSSION

Prioritize meaningful conversation over getting through every question.

Totowa Sermon Icebreaker: 5 Tests For Leaders

Pastor Ryan shared 5 tests leaders often face. Which of these do you most struggle with, and which one do you think you handle best?

- **The Criticism Test** — How you handle being questioned or criticized
- **The Weariness Test** — What exhaustion reveals in you
- **The Strength Test** — Whether your strength serves God or yourself
- **The Success Test** — Whether success produces humility or pride
- **The Worship Test** — What truly captures your heart

Ringwood Sermon Icebreaker: 7 Lessons in Bad Leadership

Pastor Tyler drew out 7 lessons of bad leadership we see from Gideon's story. Which of these do you most struggle with, and which one do you think you handle best?

- **Think God's Commands Are for Everyone Else** – Expect obedience while ignoring it yourself
- **Listen to God Last** – Look everywhere else for direction before listening to God
- **Glorify Yourself First** – Seek recognition, praise, and credit for yourself
- **Stop Listening to the Lord** – Slowly drift from dependence on God's voice
- **Trust Yourself Before You Trust God** – Rely on your own wisdom and strength first
- **Eliminate Anyone Who Doesn't Serve You** – Use or punish people instead of serving them
- **Take All the Reward, None of the Responsibility** – Want perks of leadership without the sacrifice

Dependence on God

Read Judges 7:1-8

God intentionally reduces Gideon's army from 32,000 men down to just 300 so that Israel would know the victory came from Him, not from their own strength. In both sermons it was pointed out that God often works through weakness, dependence, and surrender rather than self-sufficiency. Sometimes God allows us to feel weak so we learn to trust Him more deeply.

- Why do you think God was so determined to make sure Israel couldn't take credit for the victory?
- Why is self-reliance often more natural to us than dependence on God?

Courage That Trusts God

Read Judges 7:9-22

Even after everything God had already shown him, Gideon was still afraid. Yet God patiently meets him in his fear and continues strengthening him. Pastor Tyler pointed out that true courage isn't pretending we aren't afraid, but surrendering, obeying, and depending on God even when we are.

- What stands out to you most about the way God deals with Gideon's fear throughout this story?
- Where is God currently asking you to trust or obey Him even though you still feel afraid, uncertain, or inadequate?

The Dangers of Success

Read Judges 8:1-17

Gideon begins as a fearful man desperately dependent on God, but after victory we begin to see pride, harshness, self-reliance, and anger take over. One of the sobering realities of Gideon's story is that many people handle weakness better than they handle success.

- Why do you think success can sometimes damage a person spiritually faster than suffering can?
- Both pastors highlighted how weariness can lead people into unhealthy reactions and sinful patterns. What are some warning signs that someone - including yourself - may be spiritually, emotionally, or physically running on empty?

What Captures Our Hearts

Read Judges 8:22-27

Gideon verbally says that God alone should rule Israel, but his actions begin telling a different story. He gathers wealth, lives like a king, and eventually creates an ephod that becomes an idol and a snare to the people. Pastor Ryan pointed out that what we truly worship eventually shapes the direction of our lives.

- Pastor Ryan said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt.6:21). What are some practical ways our spending, attention, priorities, or time reveal what we truly worship?

- What is one area of your life where you feel tempted to find security, identity, comfort, or significance in something other than God?

Jesus: The Perfect Leader

Read Judges 8:32; John 10:11-15

Gideon's story reminds us how even gifted and used leaders can still drift, fail, and disappoint. Both pastors pointed the church toward Jesus, the true and perfect leader who never fails His people. Unlike Gideon, Jesus uses His strength to serve, save, and lay down His life for others.

- What differences do you see between Gideon's leadership and the way Jesus leads His people?
- How does knowing Jesus is a perfect Savior & King bring hope or encouragement to your life right now?

GROWTH STEP THIS WEEK

- **Outward Action:** Encourage or pray for someone this week who feels weak, discouraged, or afraid.
- **Inward Prayer:** Ask God to reveal any area where success, comfort, pride, fear, or self-reliance may be slowly pulling your heart away from dependence on Him.

PRAYER PROMPTS:

- Thank God that His power is made perfect in weakness
- Ask God to help you depend on Him more deeply instead of relying on yourself
- Pray for courage to obey God even when fear is still present
- Ask God to guard your heart from pride, self-reliance, and misplaced worship
- Thank Jesus for being the perfect Savior and faithful King who never fails His people

NEXT WEEK'S TEXT: Judges 13 (Samson Part One)