

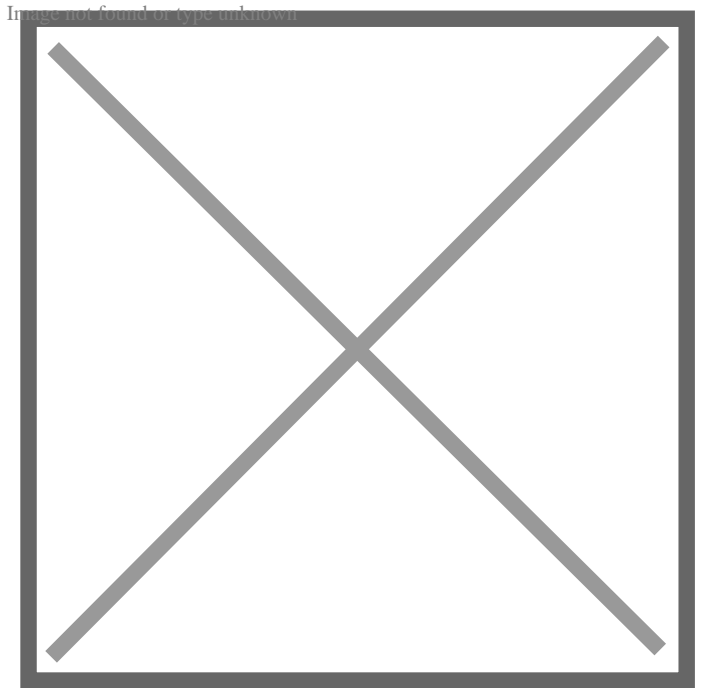
Focus – Is anything too hard for the Lord?

For sheer entertainment value, you can't beat the Old Testament book of Judges. Where else can a reader encounter an unpredictable, larger-than-life character as outrageous as Samson? What other war story has the drama and tension that unfolds as Gideon weeds his army down to a mere 300 men and defeats the formidable Midianites? What about the zany story where Ehud stabs the Moabite king in the belly, his blade lost within rolls of fat, and his servants think the king is merely detained on the chamber pot? If I were a movie maker, I think I'd spend my entire career bringing the book of Judges to the big screen.

But Judges is more than just entertainment. God continues to use these ancient historical accounts to teach his followers important lessons. One of the strongest themes in the book is that of courage. It actually commences at the beginning of the book of Joshua, but flows steadily through most of Judges. The tone is set when the Lord speaks to Joshua in chapter 1, verse 9:

"I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

I can remember a time when I actually found no comfort in these words. I believed that they were specific to the situation—God's words to Joshua only as he led the Israelites into the Promised Land. But I was terribly wrong. The command and promise of Joshua 1:9 is for every believer in whatever situation. I believe God demonstrates the universality of the verse through the many stories in Joshua and Judges where ordinary people summon up the courage to do extraordinary things for God...people like Rahab, the prostitute, who protected Israel's spies. Or the knee-knocking young Gideon, hiding in a wine press, who became one of the greatest leaders in Israel's history.



And in Judges 9, we are given the story of Jotham, a brave son of Gideon. (In this chapter Gideon is referred to by his other name, Jerubbaal.) Gideon had 70 sons, and upon his death, it would be natural for one of them to step into his leadership role. One of the sons was Abimelech, whose mother was one of Gideon's concubines. Abimelech led his mother's clansmen in the slaughter of all his brothers so that he might become leader of the nation. Only Jotham escaped. Then, in a move of staggering boldness, Jotham stood alone atop Mt. Gerizim and rebuked and even cursed Abimelech and his murderous band. After delivering God's message to them, he safely escaped.

I've been thinking about Jotham lately. I wonder what it would have been like to stand before all those blood-thirsty men and chastise them. I wonder how he escaped. Perhaps some miracle took place. Or maybe the whole clan was so stunned by his raw nerve that they were frozen where they stood, giving Jotham plenty of time to run away! I wonder what I would do if I were in Jotham's place?

If we ponder for a moment, perhaps we can recall times when God has expected us to act courageously. When one of my friends was a cadet, she was walking through the streets of Oakland on a weekend assignment, and witnessed a drug deal taking place. Though I wouldn't really describe this friend as timid, she is mild-mannered, certainly not confrontational. But, led by the Holy Spirit, she boldly approached those embroiled in the deal. Pointing to the merchandise, she said, "That won't help you. But this will." And she handed them a Christian tract.

Bravery isn't just about leading troops into battle or publicly condemning the foes of God. In fact, I suspect that every Christian is called to be bold and courageous in at least one venue, if not more. There are many levels of courage, but in each the challenge seems great, whether it is the anorexic who needs courage to eat, the victim who needs courage to report abuse, the corps officer who needs courage to confront a corps council member, the parent who needs courage to discipline his teenager, the alcoholic who needs courage to acknowledge his addiction.

God doesn't suggest that we be brave, he commands it. But that command comes with the wonderful promise that he will be with us wherever we go. With God on our side, what situation could ever overtake us?

"Is anything too hard for the Lord?"