

I love the account that Christian apologist and author Ravi Zacharias tells... that happened during a time when the Christian church in Yugoslavia was suffering under a corrupt church hierarchy. (His narrative goes like this...)

One day an evangelist by the name of Jakov arrived in a certain village. He commiserated with an elderly man named Cimmerman on the tragedies he had experienced and talked to him of the love of Christ. Cimmerman abruptly interrupted Jakov and told him that he wished to have nothing to do with Christianity. He reminded Jakov of the dreadful history of the church in his town, a history replete with plundering, exploiting, and indeed with killing innocent people.

"My own nephew was killed by them," he said and angrily rebuffed any effort on Jakov's part to talk about Christ. *"They wear those elaborate coats and crosses,"* he said, *"signifying a heavenly commission, but their evil designs and lives I cannot ignore."*

Jakov, looking for an occasion to get Cimmerman to change his line of thinking, said, *"Cimmerman, can I ask you a question? Suppose I were to steal your coat, put it on, and break into a bank. Suppose further that the police sighted me running in the distance but could not catch up with me. One clue, however, put them onto your track: they recognize your coat. What would you say to them if they came to your house and accused you of breaking into the bank?"*

"I would deny it," said Cimmerman.

"'Ah, but we saw your coat,' they would say," retorted Jakov. This analogy quite annoyed Cimmerman, who ordered Jakov to leave his home.

Jakov continued to return to the village periodically just to befriend Cimmerman, encourage him, and share the love of Christ with him. Finally one day Cimmerman asked, "*How does one become a Christian?*" Jakov taught him the simple steps of repentance for sin and of trust in the work of Jesus Christ and gently pointed him to the Shepherd of his soul. Cimmerman bent his knee on the soil with his head bowed and surrendered his life to Christ. As he rose to his feet, wiping his tears, he embraced Jakov and said, "*Thank you for being in my life.*" And then he pointed to the heavens and whispered, "*You wear His coat very well.*"

Do you wear the coat very well...? ... You may be answering to yourself... right now... "*Sometimes! Not always... but sometimes I wear the coat well... and serve as a good testimony for Jesus Christ...*"

Many people live inconsistent lives. ... And inconsistency causes all kinds of problems... problems both for the inconsistent person... and for those who observe his inconsistency. ... All kinds of guilt and problems arise for the person who lives an up and down... contradictory life. ... If a person is up one day and down the next day... spiritually excelling one week and failing the next week... full of Christ-focused joy one moment and displeased the next moment the person faces a miserable life and causes misery for others. ... The sense of failure and guilt... of coming up short... is always within the heart of an inconsistent Christian. ... And tragically... while the inconsistent believer is living in failure... or sin and evil... he/she is influencing others to fail or commit sin and evil.

Inconsistency... a life of strengths and weaknesses... was one of the major traits of Gideon. ... A picture of his fluctuating life... of both his strengths and weaknesses... is painted in the present passage of Scripture. ... This passage stands as a warning to us... against living an inconsistent life. Sometimes I announce the title of my message... and this case I will. It is... *The Strengths and Weaknesses of an Inconsistent Life.*

FIRST – a strength. ... Last week... in the passage we studied about Gideon... Judges chapter 7... The Lord is prominently mentioned. Much glory is given to Yahweh... as He orchestrates a miraculous victory for Gideon and the Israelites. ... Today... as we move into Judges chapter 8... the Lord is noticeably absent.

Gideon (with a tremendous amount of faith) has won a miraculous victory on the plains of Jezreel... with only 300 men... horns... torches... and clay pots... against a well armored Midianite army of 135,000 fighters. ... They covered the land like locusts...! ... But when the Israelites blew their horns... smashed their pots... and shouted... the Midianites turned on themselves... started slaying one another... and ran for their lives. Gideon summoned other tribes from Israel to help in the mopping up process... including the tribe of Ephraim. ... Ephraim cut off the escape route of the Midianites at the Jordan River... and captured two Midianite princes... which they beheaded. ... The enemy is on the run but the battle is not over yet.

But when the plot resumes in our chapter today... (Judges chapter 8)... something seems to have happened to the character of our hero. ... In chaps. 6–7 we witnessed the transformation of Gideon from a fearful private citizen... to a fearless agent of God... willing to take on the enemy against all odds. ... But the portrait of the man the author paints in today's

chapter... creates a radically different impression in the Bible student's mind. ... If we only had chapter 8... and we had no understanding of Gideon from chapters 6 and 7... you and I would reject Gideon as any type of hero... and the Bible society that is named for him... would have a different name. Motel rooms might have "Joseph Bibles" instead of "Gideon Bibles."

What we see today is a complete tyrant... arbitrary in his treatment of the enemy... and ruthless in his handling of his own countrymen. ... Instead of "hacking" and "contending" with the enemy... Gideon... or Jerubbaal (as he is referred to in this chapter)... "contends" and "hacks" his own people.

All of this raises the question of why the narrator spoils our admiration for this hero... who accomplished so much for God? ... Is he deliberately painting a picture of a human deliverer... so that we see our need is for a perfect divine Savior? ... Perhaps! ... But I think we can (also) learn a few other lessons from the inconsistent life of Gideon.

There were evil impulses that lurked in the heart of Gideon... He managed to keep them hidden from public view... at least for a while. But as his story unfolds in Judges chapter 8... his façade cracks. ... Our lessons today come in the form of warnings... warnings of the dangers of nursing these same evil impulses... that sometimes lurk inside of us... behind a well-maintained façade. ... We are dealing with unresolved anger... in this passage. ... Whenever we deal with our anger in an inappropriate manner... we will be inconsistent... as believers! ... We will also be looking at the problem of pride... and the fleshly element of flattery... to avoid unpleasant situations that threaten us.

We cannot deal with the evil impulses of our own hearts... on our own.
Like Gideon... we need the help of the Lord for the cause of Christ to
advance in our hearts... in our communities... and around the world. ... It
may seem to you that you are like Gideon and his army before the
Midianites... outnumbered and outgunned... *“Lord I have so many evil
impulses. They constantly threaten me!”* ... But the Lord... still today...
turns evil against itself... just as He turned the Midianites against each
other.

Gideon, before resuming his pursuit of the fleeing Midianites, first has to
deal with a conflict with fellow Israelites.

Judges 8:1

Things have been going great! ... Victory is at hand... God is working when
BANG! Satan lowers the boom on God's man. If Satan can't hinder God's
people from without... he will endeavor to destroy God's work from within
using God's people. ... Satan uses the peacocks of Israel... the proud tribe
of Ephraim to attack Gideon.

Peacocks are known for their pride... strutting around with their feathers
spread. They are very quarrelsome birds and do not get along with other
birds. Their voices are loud and unpleasant and they get louder as they
climb higher on the tree. They desire the high places. When danger is near,
peacocks will run away swiftly. Peacocks are a good description of the tribe
of Ephraim. They were the epitome of pride.

Satan is sly. He likes to attack when a great victory is won. Andrew Bonar was right: "Let us be as watchful after the victory as before the battle." After all, there may still be some land mines scattered around! ... And Satan loves to stir feuding among God's people. In the early church he tried to use problems with Ananias and Sapphira and the care of the widows to bring dissension in the church. Satan knows when we are fighting ourselves, we get sidetracked, and stop pursuing the enemy... him.

The Ephraimites were critical of those who were doing something. ... People who find lots to criticize in the lives of others... are people who have no sense of the urgency of God's call in their own life. ... They focus on others... instead of their responsibility to God! ... The tribe of Ephraim had a tendency to go to war only when the outcome was obvious and there was glory to gain. ... The Midianites were in the land seven years... why didn't the Ephraimites fight them during the previous 7 years? The truth is they simply wanted to be in on the glory... now that the Midianites were being defeated.

As we go on... in Judges... we will see the same problem surface again. After a future judge... Jephthah... is victorious in battle over the Ammonites... Ephraim will gripe again, "*Why didn't you call us? We are now going to burn your house down!*" Jephthah responds, "*I did call you, but you wouldn't come!*" They were like peacocks fleeing from danger. Jephthah responds differently than Gideon. (When we get to verse 3... we will see how Gideon treats them with flattery.) ... Not so with Jephthah! ... He deals severely with their traitorous actions. He battles with Ephraim... and 42,000 are killed. Jephthah wipes out the entire tribe!

The peacock pride of Ephraim... is what ends up destroying them. ... This can happen to us too. ... Are you a peacock...? proud...? selfish...? and critical...?

Selfish people are concerned about how everything effects them... "Do for me! ... Give to me! ... I want my way!" ... Selfish people are not concerned about their responsibility and treatment of others. ... More marriages would have silver or golden anniversaries... if couples would be more concerned about pleasing and meeting the needs of their spouse... than their own needs. ... For almost every marriage that is in trouble... there is a peacock. And dare I say it...? But for nearly every church that is troubled with conflict... there are peacocks. ... How will Gideon respond to the peacocks who have confronted him...?

Judges 8:2

What Gideon did with only 300 men... that sent the Midianites to flight... was such an outstanding... courageous act... that it makes the Ephraimites mopping up look very small! ... Gideon and his troops were FAR superior to the Ephraimites in their achievement... yet Gideon exalted them above his efforts... for their far lesser performance.

This is our first glimpse that something has changed inside of Gideon. ... Two chapters previous to this... in Judges 6:34... we read that the Spirit of Yahweh "clothed" Gideon. ... But Gideon no longer seems to be clothed in the Spirit... because flattery is a reliance on our flesh... not the Spirit of God. This lie... (the flattery that Gideon spoke)... would not be something that God would ever lead any of us... to do. ... The façade of Gideon is

beginning to crack... and we are starting to notice something else is lurking inside of him.

Judges 8:3

The Ephraimites gave themselves away for their pride. ... Once they were praised... they were happy. ... (LISTEN... JUST AS A SIDE NOTE...) If you will not serve well unless you are praised... you simply will not serve well at all. ... Peacocks usually don't serve well... because so much service for the Lord is to be done in obscurity without applause.

Notice how Gideon's arguments are psychologically based... and not theologically based. ... Gideon does not speak of God's leading and how he had been clothed with Yahweh's Spirit.

When you reflect on the way the attack on Midian was handled... it was wisdom on Gideon's part that he hadn't called for volunteers from Ephraim. These peacocks would have been incensed if Gideon had told the frightened men to go home... and their volunteers would not have tolerated his thinning out the ranks to only 300 soldiers! ... If Gideon had called them and then sent most of them back... they would have created a far worse problem *before* the battle... than they affected afterward.

Two Midianite kings and several of their men had escaped and crossed back over the Jordan River to their homeland. ... If Gideon allows them to re-group... they will come back with stronger forces. ... So Gideon and the same 300 men pursue them across the river. But Gideon's motivation changes. ... His new motivation will have him relentlessly pursue... even

though he and his troops are utterly exhausted. But then... this motive gets out of hand.

Judges 8:4-8

Gideon and his tiny army cross the Jordan and wearily march 40 miles to Succoth... a city inherited by the Israelite tribe of Dan. ... Gideon and his men come to their fellow Israelites... who located on the other side of the river.

Gideon was not playing the welfare game where he wanted something for nothing. ... It was completely RIGHT for him to expect the support he requested from his fellow Israelites. Gideon had done them as much good in driving out the Midianites... as he had done for all the other cities of Israel. The people from whom he requested food ought to have given it just out of appreciation for what Gideon and his army had done. They had been plagued by the Midian locusts. Now they would enjoy peace... so... now they should be willing to help pay for it.

But they said they would not help Gideon unless he had secured absolute victory by capturing the two kings. This was a very bad excuse. Anyone can take the victor's side when the game is over, but to stand and fight for victory is another matter. ... They were simply cowards. ... They would not take a stand until the victor was determined. They were simply crass cowards. They will not take a stand until it is popular.

Gideon and his men go to ANOTHER Israelite city and are treated in the exact same manner. ... Gideon asked for bread and they wanted to know if they had the kings already. ... They are like the politician who wets his finger and puts it up to see the direction the wind is blowing. ... People of character... conviction... and principle... do not see which way the wind is blowing. ... They do what is right because it is right to do.

Judges 8:9-11

Gideon then approaches the men of Peniel, another eastern city, and they also turn him away. Gideon promises to punish the men of Peniel by tearing down the city's defensive tower. The Lord's first charge to Gideon was to tear down and cut down his father's pagan altars and replace them with an altar to the Lord. Now, he pledges to tear down a tower that his countrymen use to defend themselves against the pagans.

The Lord was extraordinarily patient with Gideon, but Gideon is extraordinarily impatient with his countrymen. West of the Jordan, he employed a flattering diplomacy. East of the Jordan, he pledges revenge. What's happened to Gideon? The Lord transformed Gideon into a mighty warrior, but Gideon has transformed himself into something closer to a bloodthirsty tyrant. A new Gideon emerges after he crosses the Jordan. When Gideon crossed the Jordan, he crossed some sort of line. What gives? Is there something we're missing? Is there something the narrator hasn't told us yet? We must keep reading.

How do we respond to those who don't cooperate with our agendas? Anger is a common response, and if we nurse it, it can easily morph into a desire

for revenge. If you let that happen, you take a step away from Proverbs 15:1 (“A gentle answer turns away wrath”) and you take a step toward a new type of proverb (A wrathful answer promises revenge). You tend to forget about defusing a conflict and instead consider picking a fight. You might misuse the Lord’s promises to punish those who don’t cooperate with your agenda. You might plow through places that should remind you of how God has transformed you only to promise revenge. You might forget that God has been patient with you and become impatient with others. Whereas the Lord has shown you grace, you might neglect to show grace to others.

Which brings us back to the story of Gideon: how does Gideon deal with the people who have slighted him? ... But first... Gideon continues his relentless pursuit of the two Midianite kings...

Zebah and Zalmunna had managed to escape to Karkor. Although the site cannot be located with certainty... the most likely identification places Karkor one hundred miles east of the Dead Sea. ... They didn’t expect Gideon to follow them THAT FAR. ... The Midianites had escaped deep into the desert... where the tent-dwelling nomads lived. ... No wonder verse 11 says Gideon surprised them... because they felt secure.

Judges 8:12-17

For the second time... Gideon catches the Midianites unaware. This time, he also captures the two kings he was pursuing, Zebah and Zalmunna. Then... Just as he promised... Gideon returns to Sukkoth and Peniel.

First... he tortures the elders of Sukkoth. Mutilating their bodies by dragging them over thorns and briars.

Second... he not only pulls down the tower of Peniel... as promised... he also kills the men of the town. ... Gideon didn't say anything about killing anyone... but when it comes time to exact revenge... simply pulling down the tower is no longer enough for him. ... His thirst for vengeance won't be satisfied unless he tastes blood. ... If you've offended Gideon... you want to be first in line when he comes after you... because it's going to be worse for those who are second in line. ... Gideon metes out revenge unevenly.

Sukkoth and Peniel treated Gideon in the same way... but Peniel comes in for the harsher punishment. ... This looks as senseless as the Midianites did... when Gideon blew his horn. ... When Gideon first attacked the Midianites, they unwittingly turned their swords against each other in the middle of the night. ... Having defeated Midian... Gideon brazenly turns his sword against his own countrymen in the light of day. ... Gideon - called to deliver Israel – attacks Israel. ... These Israelites need to be delivered from their deliverer.

If we act on a desire for revenge... we will never be satisfied... because we never profit from someone else's pain. ... What's more likely to happen... therefore... is that... being unsatisfied with a little... you will want more. ... Your desire for revenge will escalate... as it escalated for Gideon. ... Gideon... by all appearances... is incensed with rage. ... Why?

Judges 8:18-21 will bring to light... what was going on... inside of Gideon. We will finally see what took over... as his new motive.

Judges 8:18-21

Gideon now interrogates his prisoners, the two kings. He asks them about the men they killed at Tabor, west of the Jordan. If you've read this far in Judges, you might want to start rereading earlier chapters, thinking that you missed something. But you could re-read the previous chapters, you could read all of Judges, and you could read the whole Bible and never discover the killings at Tabor — because they are only recorded HERE in Judges 8:18-20.

The narrator has skillfully withheld reporting the killings until this point in the story. ... Now we know why Gideon... like an animal on the prowl... hunted down the two kings. ... Now we know why Gideon defused a potential conflict with the men of Ephraim... who threatened to distract him from his quest... and why he flew into such a rage at the men of Sukkoth and Peniel. Gideon was tracking down the killers of his brothers... (as verse 19 makes clear... these were his flesh and blood... his very siblings... the sons of his own mother!)

Probably... long before he crossed the Jordan... Gideon crossed a line. He decided to nurse his anger west of the Jordan... when saw the opportunity to take revenge on the very men who had (at some previous point in time) murdered his brothers. It was probably during one of their raids on the land. ... Now he had a group of fearless fighters who were willing to pursue them with him.

Gideon let personal concerns overtake national concerns. He sees the two kings not as enemies of the Lord but as personal enemies. Gideon turned the call to deliver Israel into a personal vendetta. Once again, Gideon invokes the name of the Lord in connection with personal vengeance: “*as surely as the Lord lives ...*” He tells the two kings that if they had spared the lives of his brothers, he wouldn’t kill them. Gideon showed no such mercy for his own countrymen, the men of Peniel, who killed no one. His would-be willingness to let his enemies live demonstrates his attachment to his personal crusade.

What matters most to Gideon is how you treat him and his family. As a national leader, he’s a failure. He’s also a failure as a father. Gideon involves his son, Jether, in his unholy agenda, ordering him to put the kings to death. Jether, being inexperienced in such matters, balks. He’s afraid—like his father was afraid... before the Angel of the Lord appeared.

But whereas the Lord was patient with Gideon, Gideon exposes his son to public shame. Gideon puts his son in the awkward position of choosing between joining his father’s unholy crusade and exposing himself as unmanly.

The two kings, sensing weakness in Gideon, taunt him for ordering his son to do his dirty work and question his “strength.” So Gideon rises in his own strength to defend his manhood and carry out his personal vendetta. He kills the kings himself.

Anger feels good... that’s why we nurse it. ... But look what anger can do to us if we nurse it... let it grow into a desire for revenge... and act on that

desire. ... It can turn a man of incredible faith... like Gideon... into an animal on the prowl. ... It can make you fly into a rage at others... for virtually no reason. ... The desire for revenge can make you obsess over your concerns and lose sight of God's concerns. ... It can turn the call of the kingdom of God into a personal vendetta. ... It can persuade you to invoke the name of the Lord in the cause of personal vengeance.

The desire for revenge can turn you into a failure... as a ministry leader... or as a parent. ... It can make you put others... even your own children... in no-win situations... forcing them to choose between embracing your unholy agenda and exposing themselves to public shame. ... It can make you vulnerable to the taunts of the agents of the evil one. ... Finally... the desire for revenge can make you rise... not in the strength of the Lord... to prevail against evil... but to rise in your own strength... to defend yourself and thereby participate in your own evil. ... If you continue to nurse your anger... it will take over your life.

The thing about crossing a line is that whenever you think you've crossed it... you probably crossed it a long time ago. ... You crossed it when you decided to nurse your anger.

Instead of nursing your anger... cultivate thankfulness. On the road to rage... Gideon missed several opportunities to give thanks to the Lord... for transforming places of fear and doubt into places of victory... for being patient with him... for showing him grace... and for strengthening him.

Has God treated you differently... than the way you want others to be treated...? ... Has God expressed abundant mercy... forgiveness... and love to you... but there are people in your life... who you somehow believe deserve far worse than that from you...?

Romans 15:7

Therefore receive one another as Christ has received you, for the glory of God.