

Do You Bury Your Face in the Water?

Dear Friend,

Recently, I have been strongly impressed by the words of the Lord in Isaiah 55:8–9:

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

As I was pondering on the vast gap that separates God’s ways and thoughts from ours, I was forcefully reminded of the account of Gideon and his army in Judges 6, 7 and 8.

At this time, Israel had fallen into sin and idolatry and—as a judgment—God permitted vast hordes of Midianites to invade their land each year and rob them of their harvest.

One day, while Gideon was furtively threshing wheat in a winepress—to hide it from the Midianites—the Angel of the LORD appeared to him and said, *“The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor!”* (Judges 6:11–12). Obviously the Lord saw Gideon quite differently from the way that he saw himself. Gideon saw himself as young, weak, and ineffective. The Lord hailed him as a *“mighty man of valor.”*

We each need to be less concerned with how we see ourselves and more concerned with how God sees us. In Christ, each one of us is a *new man . . . created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness* (Ephesians 4:24). Viewing ourselves like this will inevitably affect the way we live.

The Lord then commissioned Gideon to lead Israel in battle against the Midianites. In response, Gideon assembled an army by the well of Harod, with the Midianites encamped to the north.

What were the numbers on both sides?

Gideon’s army	32,000 ¹
Midianites	135,000 ²



Derek Prince



Jerusalem, Israel

Thus, Gideon with 32,000 men faced 135,000 Midianites. He was outnumbered more than four to one.

Imagine Gideon's reaction when the Lord told him, "*The people who are with you are too many!*" (Judges 7:2).

The Lord instructed Gideon to send away all those in his army who were fearful and afraid. As a result, 22,000 men departed and Gideon was left with 10,000. At this point he was outnumbered more than thirteen to one.

But God was not finished! To Gideon's astonishment, He said, "*The people are still too many.*"

Then He instructed Gideon to bring his men down to the water, so that He might test them there by the way they drank from the water. All those who went down on both knees to drink were eliminated. Only those who lapped like a dog passed the test (Judges 7:4-7).

One Essential Character Requirement

The test focused on one single character requirement: **vigilance**.

Picture first those who drank in the normal way. Laying aside their shield from the left arm and their spear—or sword—from the right arm, they went down on both knees and buried their faces in the water. In this posture, they were totally vulnerable to a surprise attack. They could not see any approaching enemy, nor did they have their weapons ready to use. In the time they took to get themselves ready, the enemy would have overcome them.

What about those who lapped like dogs? When a dog drinks, it does not bury its nose in the water, it stretches out its tongue and laps the water up into its mouth, usually splashing some water around.

How, then, should we picture the men who lapped? They went down on one knee only. Retaining their shield on their left arm, with the right arm they set down their spear or sword beside them. Then, with a cupped hand, they scooped up the water to their mouths.

In this posture, they remained alert, constantly watching for any surprise attack. Their shields were already in position and they could instantly pick up their spear or sword and have it ready to use. There was no possibility of the enemy taking them by surprise.

Only 300 of Gideon's men passed this second test. They were facing 135,000 Midianites. They were outnumbered 450 to one!

I can picture some of those who were dismissed saying to themselves, “Well, thank God we’re out of that! That man, Gideon, must be crazy. What difference does it make how a man drinks water? Let’s see what will become of him and the idiots who stayed with him.”

In the outcome, of course, Gideon and his 300 broke through the Midianites and threw them into total confusion. After that, other Israelites rallied behind them and inflicted a total defeat on the Midianites.

The proportions are illuminating. Only 300 men fulfilled the qualifications for making the initial breakthrough. But once the breakthrough was made, there were thousands of Israelites who were eager to pursue the fleeing Midianites.

This whole account vividly illustrates how different God’s ways are from ours. Left to himself, Gideon would surely have concluded, “The people with me are too few. I need to get reinforcements.”

But God’s perspective was exactly the opposite. “*The people with you are too many.*” In the end, Gideon was left with less than one out of a hundred of those who originally joined him. For God, the question is not “How many people?” but “What kind of people?”

A Personal Assessment

In the light of this account, we each need to make a personal assessment. If God should gather an army today like that of Gideon, would I be one of the few who qualify?

Or would I be like the first 22,000 who gave way to fear? Or like the second 10,000 who laid down their weapons and buried their faces in the water to drink?

It is easy—and often normal—to *bury our faces* in the business of daily living; to be absorbed in all the practical needs that confront us every day; to forget that we are in a spiritual conflict with unseen forces of darkness who are continually watching for an opportunity to catch us unprepared.

To maintain unceasing vigilance in every situation demands conscious, personal discipline. It goes beyond all our normal concepts of Christian conduct and morality. Yet the New Testament clearly warns us: *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour* (1 Peter 5:8). If we ignore this warning, we become vulnerable to subtle, unpredictable assaults of Satan.

Take, for example, the question of holidays (vacations). Ruth and I have found that we cannot effectively continue our ministry unless we pause from time to time to take a holiday and to wait upon God. (Our holidays really are *holy days*.)

But I have learned one thing: *Satan never takes a holiday*. Just when we feel our greatest need to relax, Satan releases some totally unanticipated pressure against us and we may easily be caught without our weapons ready for immediate use.

Does that mean, then, that we no longer take holidays? No! But it means that we do not *bury our faces* in our holidays; we do not lay down our weapons. We have learned that holidays are often times when we need to exercise the greatest vigilance.

But holidays are just one example that would apply in many different areas: family relationships, business activities, special celebrations, educational opportunities. We can participate in all of these, but we must not *bury our faces* in any.

Remember, in Gideon's army, less than one out of a hundred qualified! Would the proportions be different today?

Yours in the Master's service,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Derek Prince". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Derek Prince

¹ Judges 7:3 records that after 22,000 left him, Gideon still had 10,000.

² Judges 8:10 records that after 120,000 Midianites had been killed, 15,000 still survived.