

HERO

When an ordinary person meets
an extraordinary God

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Hero: when an ordinary person meets an extraordinary God
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Introduction



My brain is strange.

Some days I wake up and feel fantastic. I'm full of high hopes, making big plans, dreaming about all I'll achieve in life. Feeling like nothing is going to stop me. I say to myself: "1, 2, 3, it's good to be me". (By the way, I didn't come up with that—it's a song my four-year-old sings at school.)

Other days I wake up and feel hopeless. I look at myself in the mirror and wonder what I'm doing. Other people seem so much more gifted. Other people seem so much more useful. I'm wasting my time. I say to myself: "4, 3, 2, I wish I was you". (Just for the record, I did make that up. They don't sing that at school.)

Does that make me strange? Or can you relate to that too?

I compare myself with others, and my brain flip-flops between "1, 2, 3" and "4, 3, 2". Either I'm proud and think I'm amazing. Or I despair and think I'm a waste of space.

This book will help to set us free from that sort of thinking. We're going to find out what happened **when an ordinary man called Gideon met the extraordinary God of the Bible**. As we dig deeply into the life of Gideon, we'll find so much more than just an

ancient story. We'll actually discover truth that we desperately need to hear.

For a start, it will bring us face to face with who we really are. That might get a bit painful. But we're not stopping there.

We'll push on; we'll come face to face with the living God. I'm talking about God as he really is, not just our own little ideas about him. He's **bigger and more magnificent** than we've ever imagined.

We'll discover the sort of people God loves to use. Let's just say they're not who we might expect.

And best of all, we'll come face to face with Jesus. Seeing him clearly changes everything.

Some people reading this book may not know much about Jesus at all. That's ok. There's loads for you here. Perhaps reading this book will help answer some of your questions. And more than just having your questions answered, I hope you might even meet Jesus for yourself...

There'll be others who've started following Jesus, but are finding it hard. Often we can feel rubbish and useless. We want to be impressive, but feel like failures. If that's you, wait and see what God wants to teach you from the pages of his Bible...

Chapter One: Hero hunting



The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior."

"Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian."

The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?"

"Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."

The LORD answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive."

Judges 6 v 11-16

It doesn't happen often, but just occasionally you get the chance to be truly heroic. Like the day I (almost) saved a baby from great danger. I was sixteen years old. The baby was in a car, the car was locked, and the keys were inside. It was a baking hot day and the

child was in danger of cooking. The mother was panicking. Then I arrived and saw the opportunity to be a hero. I proudly announced that using only a thin strip of plastic I would open the door and rescue the baby. (It was something I had seen on the telly.) The mother was so grateful as I set to work. With a few deft flicks of my wrist, the helpless, endangered child would be free and I would be the hero of the hour.



The beads of sweat gathered on my forehead. The concentration required was immense. It was more tricky than I imagined. **It had all looked so easy** when I saw it on TV—but in real life, it was a different story. The minutes ticked by. The mother was becoming more stressed; so was the baby; and so was I. Still I worked and still I failed. After half an hour the mother realised that her super saviour was in fact a major muppet. She phoned the police.

They turned up, pulled out a baton, smashed a window and in thirty seconds rescued the baby.

I hid my thin piece of plastic in my pocket and sidled sheepishly away—dreaming of what might have been. I wanted to be a hero, but turned out to be a zero...

Heroes and zeroes

Being a hero feels good, doesn't it?

I guess that explains why being called a "LOSER" is so painful. If my kids call me bald or old or out of touch, I can laugh—but if someone calls me a "loser", it hits hard. Why am I so bothered? It's simple. That word strikes at a fear deep inside me.

I don't want to be a loser: I want to be a hero. I don't want to be a nobody: I want to be a somebody. I don't want to be at the bottom of the pile: I want to stand on top.

It's not surprising we feel that way. We celebrate strength, not weakness. There are competitions to find the world's strongest man. These guys bulge with muscles and pull trains with their teeth. But what about the world's weakest man? Where is the competition to find him? We talk endlessly about who is the richest person in the world, but no one is bothered about the poorest. We know the fastest; but who is the slowest?

To be a loser or a failure or a wimp is a disaster, so our goal in life is to avoid it. We must find some way in which we can prove our worth. Make our mark. Stand out from the crowd. It might be your exam results, your beauty, your sporting success, your fashion sense, your latest gadget, your singing voice or whatever. It doesn't really matter. Anything that will raise you above the rest and get you noticed. Posting crazy pictures of you on *Facebook*, or getting yourself on TV. Anything goes.

But there's a problem. If everyone is trying to be a winner, then most people will fail. Most people will have to settle for average and ordinary, which many people find profoundly depressing.



Meet the loser

By definition we can't all be winners; we can't all be heroes.

That brings us nicely to Gideon. You see, Gideon is not really in the hero/winner category—and that's being generous. Don't take my word for it; here is how Gideon describes himself in his own words:

My clan is the weakest ... and I am the least in my family.
Judges 6 v 15

Here's a man with some serious self-esteem issues. Gideon basically admits he's a loser. Out of all the families of Israel, he belongs to Loser Family—and out of all the people in that family, he is Loser Boy.

This is not looking promising.

And Gideon doesn't just say he is a loser; he acts like one too. The very first time we meet Gideon, he is down a hole. Hiding. He's preparing dinner in a winepress—in a trench dug in the ground where grapes would be crushed to make wine. He's **hanging out in a ditch**. It's not the first place you'd go looking if you needed a hero.

What's he doing there?

Let's not be too harsh. Outside Gideon's winepress was a very dangerous world, a world of vicious enemies and violent bullies. Every year the armies of Midian would come; marching into Israel and devouring everything around them. It was a terrifying time. No one could possibly stand up to them. There was no chance of fighting them. The only option was to find yourself somewhere safe and get your head down.

So Gideon chose the security of a winepress. It wasn't heroic; it wasn't impressive; but what other option did he have? He was destined to a life at the bottom of the heap. The life of a loser.

But here's the weird thing. When God needed a bully-smashing hero, he didn't go to the boxing club or the army barracks. He didn't arrange a beauty parade or see who has the biggest wallet. **He went hero hunting in the winepress.** He chose Gideon.

He deliberately seeks out the weakest man in all of Israel and picks him.

What is that about?

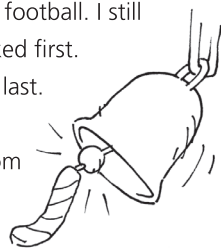


Why pick Gideon?

We need to get our heads round this. We need to think hard. If you can understand why God picked Gideon, then you might even start to believe that God is bothered with you.

We're surrounded all the time with messages telling us that in order to be worth anything you have to be strong. You have to be clever. You have to be beautiful. You have to be funny. It's a lesson you learn early in life.

I still remember the daily stress of being eight years old. I still remember the bell ringing to announce the start of playtime. I still remember the wire fence we lined up against. I still remember David Murphy and Kevin Hooker choosing their teams for football. I still remember the strongest and fastest boys being picked first. One by one. I still remember hoping I would not be last. I still remember that horrible moment when only I would be left. I still remember the chilling words from one captain to the other: "You can have him".



You learn these things early.

So we assume God works the same way; that he picks the fastest and the best for his team. But he doesn't. Open up the Bible and see it for yourself.

God comes to Gideon—a terrified, weak, unimpressive bloke hiding away. God looks at this loser and says to him: "You are my man".

And it's not just Gideon; God does this over and over again. The greatest example of all is when Jesus hangs on a Roman cross. He is naked. He is battered. He is struggling to breathe. He is abandoned. He dies the death of a loser. Yet in that very moment of weakness, God is saving the world (much more on that later). Don't be fooled by what seems to be weak. In God's hands it is a mighty thing.

Later in the Bible, in a letter written to a church, it says this:

*But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise;
God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.*

1 Corinthians 1 v 27

God deliberately turns our thinking upside down. He doesn't want us to be full of how great we are. Instead, he wants us to see how much we need him.

There's a problem with winners: they don't think they need anyone else. They become proud of what they have done, and that makes them useless to God.

But weak people who know they need help are different. A weak person who learns to rely on God is exactly who God is looking for.

This is hard for us to believe, but it will save us from a life of disappointment and frustration. In God's eyes, **weak people relying on him are far more useful than strong people relying on themselves.**

One man who understood this ended up saying a really strange thing.

I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

2 Corinthians 12 v 9-10

This transforms how we view ourselves. Rather than hiding and covering up our weaknesses, we can face them. Our weaknesses are what make us useful to God! We can even learn to boast about them.

Mighty warrior

But don't get the impression that following Jesus means being a loser. No way. **God doesn't come to Gideon and say: "Hello Loser Boy"**. Instead he says: "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior".

Here's what God is all about; this is God's business. He takes losers and transforms them into mighty warriors. He calls people to *be strong in the LORD and in his mighty power*.

That's what we want to understand as we travel through this story of Gideon.

We'll watch God transform Gideon before our eyes. It's going to be quite a ride. Along the way we'll learn loads about God—and about the sort of people he loves to use.

It's not what we might think.