

**Samuel Logan Brengle:**

(Judges vi. and vii.)

One hundred and twenty thousand Midianites had come up to fight against Israel, and thirty-two thousand Israelites rose up to fight for their wives, their children, their homes, their liberty, their lives. But God saw that if one Israelite whipped nearly four Midianites he would be so puffed up with pride and conceit that he would forget God, and say, "Mine own hand hath saved me" (vii. 2).

The Lord also knew that there were a lot of weak-kneed followers among them, with cowardly hearts, who would like an excuse to run away, so He told Gideon to say: "Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead." The sooner fearful folks leave us the better. "And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand" (vii. 3). They were afraid to show the enemy their faces, but they were not ashamed to show them their backs.

But the Lord saw that if one Israelite whipped twelve Midianites he would be all the more puffed up, so He made a still further test.

He said unto Gideon: "The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there." God often tries people at the table and the tea-pot. "And it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go. So he brought down the people unto the water: and the Lord said unto Gideon, Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink. And the number of them that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men; but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water. And the Lord said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place. So the people took victuals in their hand, and their trumpets: and he sent all the rest of Israel every man unto his tent, and retained those three hundred men" (Judges vii. 4-8).

These three hundred men meant business. They were not only unafraid, but they were not self-indulgent. They knew how to fight, but they knew something even more important -- they knew how to deny themselves. They knew how to deny themselves, not only when there was very little water, but when a river rolled at their feet. They were, no doubt, quite as thirsty as the others, but they did not propose to throw down their arms and fall down on their faces to drink in the presence of the enemy. They stood up, kept their eyes open, watched the enemy, kept one hand on shield and bow, while with the other they brought water to their thirsty lips. The other fellows were not afraid to fight, but they must drink first, even if the enemy did steal a march on them while prostrate on the ground satisfying their thirst. Number one must be cared for, if the army were crushed. They were self-indulgent and never dreamed of denying themselves for the common good; so God sent them home along with the fellows that were afraid, and with the three hundred He routed the Midianites. That was one to four hundred. No chance of self-conceit there! They won the victory and became immortal, but God got the glory.

There are fearful people who cannot face a laugh or a sneer, much less a determined foe. If they cannot be led to lay hold of the strength and boldness of the Lord, the sooner they quit the field the better; let them go back to their wives and babies and sweethearts and mothers.

But there are many who are not afraid. They rather enjoy a fight. They would as soon wear uniform, sell The War Cry, march the streets, face a mob, sing and pray and testify in the presence of enemies, as stay at home, perhaps rather. But they are self-indulgent! If they like a thing they must have it, however much it may hurt them and so unfit them for the fight.

I am acquainted with some people who know that tea and cake and candy injure them, but they like these things, and so they indulge themselves, at the risk of grieving the Spirit of God, and destroying their health, which is the capital God has given them to do His work with.

I know some people who ought to know that a big supper before a meeting taxes the digestive organs, draws the blood from the head to the stomach, makes one drowsy and dull and heavy, and unfits the soul to feel spiritual realities keenly and to stand between God and the people, pleading with God, in mighty, believing, Elijah -- like prayer, and prevailing with the people in clear testimony and burning exhortation. But they are

hungry, they like such and such things, and so they tickle their palate with the things they like, punish their stomachs, spoil their meetings, disappoint the starving, hungry souls of the people, and grieve the Holy Ghost -- all to gratify their appetites.

I know people who cannot watch with Jesus through a half-night of prayer without buns and coffee. Imagine wrestling Jacob (Gen. xxxii.) stopping, in that desperate all-night of prayer with the angel for the blessing before meeting his injured brother Esau in the morning, to have buns and coffee! If his soul had been no more desperate than that, he could have had his buns, but on his return to wrestle he would have found the angel gone; and next morning, instead of learning that the angel who had disjoined his thigh, but left his blessing, had also melted Esau's hard heart, he would have found an angry brother, who would have been ready to carry out his threat of twenty years before and take his life. But Jacob was desperate. He wanted God's blessing so much that he forgot all about his body. In fact, he prayed so earnestly that his thigh was put out of joint, and he did not complain. He had gained the blessing. Glory to God!

When Jesus prayed and agonized and sweat, as it were, great drops of blood in the Garden, His disciples slept, and He was grieved that they could not watch with Him one hour. And He must be grieved today that so many cannot, or will not, watch with Him; will not deny their inmost self to win victory over the powers of Hell and snatch souls from the bottomless pit.

We read of Daniel (Dan. x. 3) that for three long weeks he ate no pleasant food, but gave himself to prayer during all the time he possibly could, so eager was he to know the will of God and get the blessing. And he got it. One day God sent an angel to him who said "O man greatly beloved!" and then told him all he wanted to know.

In Acts xiv. 23 we read that Paul and Barnabas prayed and fasted -- not feasted -- that the people might be blessed before they left a certain corps. They were greatly interested in the soldiers they left behind them.

We know that Moses, and Elijah, and Jesus fasted and prayed for forty days, and immediately after mighty works were done.

And so, all mighty men of God have learned to deny themselves and keep their bodies under, and God has set their souls on fire, helped them to win victory against all odds, and bless the whole world.

A man should not deny himself food and drink to the injury of his body. But one night of watching and fasting and praying can starve no one; and the man who is willing to forget his body occasionally for a short time, in the interest of his soul and the souls of others, will reap blessings which will amaze himself and all who know him.

But this self-restraint must be constant. It will not do to fast all night and feast all next day. The Apostle writes of being "temperate in all things" (1 Cor. ix. 25); and he might have added, "at all times."

Again, Gideon's band did some night work, or early morning work. They got ahead of their enemies by getting up early.

People who indulge their bodies in food and drink also usually indulge them in sleep. They eat late at night, and sleep heavily and lazily next morning, and usually need a cup of strong tea to clear their heads. Getting up late, the work of the day crowds upon them, and they have almost no time to praise the Lord, pray and read the Bible. Then the cares of the day press upon them, and their hearts get full of things other than the joy of the Lord. Jesus must wait till they have done everything else before He can catch their ear; and so their day is spoiled.

Oh, that they knew the advantage, the luxury, the hilarious joy of early rising to fight the Midianites! It seems that Gideon, the captain, was up and about all night, and he roused his people early, and they had the Midianites all whipped and scattered before day-dawn.

Four hundred devils cannot stand before the man who makes it the rule of his life to get up early to praise the Lord and plead for God's blessing on his own soul and on the world. They will flee away.

John Fletcher used to mourn if he knew of a laborer getting out to his daily toil before he himself was up praising God and fighting the devil. He said: "What! does that man's earthly master deserve more ready service than my Heavenly Master?" Another old saint lamented greatly if he heard the birds singing before he got up to

praise God.

We read that Jesus arose early and went out alone to pray. Joshua got up early in the morning to set battle in array against Jericho and Ai.

John Wesley went to bed sharp at ten -- unless he had an all-night of prayer -- and got up promptly at four. Six hours of sleep was all he wanted. And when eighty-two years old, he said he was a wonder to himself, for during the twelve years previous he had not been sick a day, nor felt weary, nor lost an hour's sleep, although he traveled thousands of miles each year, in winter and summer, on horseback and in carriages, and preached hundreds of sermons, and did work that not one man out of a thousand could do -- all of which he attributed to the blessing of God on his simple, plain way of living and to a clear conscience. He was a very wise and useful man, and he considered the matter of such grave importance that he wrote and published a sermon on Redeeming the Time from sleep.

A Captain wrote me the other day that he had begun to do his praying in the morning when his mind was fresh and before the cares of the day had got the start of him.

It means more to belong to Gideon's band than most people ever dreamed of; but I have joined it, glory to God! and my soul is on fire. It is a joy to live and belong to such a company.