

WD January 23, 2023

“Look Up!”

It all started in middle school. Tricia was in fifth grade and was playing volley ball. The little school had an A team and a B team. The A team was just what it sounds like. The A team was made up of the better players who were mostly from the older 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade, one of whom was an 8<sup>th</sup> grader named Sandy. However, the A team didn't have enough players so Tricia and one other classmate were asked to play for the A team because of their skill sets at the time. And the A team is where Tricia stayed for the remainder of middle school. This was a big deal to a young girl who was shy and introverted.

Fast forward to high school. Tricia was a shy freshman by this point and once again qualified to make the volley ball team where she would play alongside of Sandy who was a senior by then. During a practice the girls would make two single file lines directly across from the other. The two in front would face each other about ten feet apart. The drill was to bump the ball to the teammate directly across to the person at the front of the other line. As soon as one bumped the ball she would run straight across to the back of the opposing line on the other side. Well, as this drill was carried out Tricia bumped the ball and then ran to the other side passing the senior, Sandy as she made her way to the other side. Tricia was running with her head down and eyes on the floor as shy people often do. As she ran by Sandy, she yelled out to Tricia, “Look up!” In high school when a senior says something to a freshman a freshman listens.

Tricia told me those two words from Sandy really hit her. Tricia remembers telling herself after that day to look up. Yea, one needs to look up to bump the ball but for Tricia it was like discovering a whole new world. Those two words were a kind of turning point for Tricia one that still affects her to this day.

Being extroverted or introverted is not good or bad. But confidence is not easy for introverts. Yet, all it takes is two words by the right person at the right moment to instill just a little bit of a boost that shifts a normally self-reflective mind to see themselves differently. I see it all the time in kids, especially in middle school kids. Shoulders sort of slump, heads down, and eyes that look away in fear of being seen themselves. Something in their world holds them back from stepping out so they tend to keep the world small even though somewhere inside they crave more. As an introvert myself back in the day I remember the envy I felt when I saw a classmate who didn't have my “limitations.” My way of compensating was to be a class clown at times. I made my poor 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, Mr. Griffiths a basket case. But something that is always powerful for an introvert is for someone to inspire them; for someone like a senior to notice and then say just two words, “look up.”

Let me share two other words, “Mighty Warrior.” In Judges 6 the Angel of the Lord (which we know is the preincarnate Jesus) appears to Gideon. When we meet Gideon he is threshing wheat in a wine press. Threshing was usually done on a hill where the wind can carry away the chaff. Instead, he was using a wine press to keep any of the Midianites from taking it. The Midianites had been bullying Israel for a generation at this point. The Angel of the Lord appears to Gideon and says, “The Lord is with you, Mighty Warrior.” He didn't greet Gideon as “Mighty Wheat thresher,” but as “Mighty Warrior.” And then the Lord says, “Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. I am after all sending you.”

Listen to Gideon's response in verse 15ff as a response of a person who is hiding himself from the world. Sometimes I wonder if he was still a teenager at this point. “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.” Translation, “I think you have the wrong guy. I am a far cry from a mighty warrior.” Notice the classic nature of where Gideon is at this point. First, he feels that he exists in an environment that he cannot change. The Midianites (the bullies) have forced him to adapt and thresh wheat in hidden wine press. Second, notice how he compares himself to others; “He's from the weakest clan in Manasseh”. His home, his family, his life is “small,” “least,” compared to the other clans; compared to other kids in school, the other guys at work, etc. “I am just not that important.” “Even within my family I am ‘least’”.

What comes next are a series of events that encourage Gideon. Gideon asks for signs to confirm his calling. A sacrifice of a goat is made with flour and it evaporates when the Lord touches it. Secondly, he tears down the altar of Baal, and then sacrifices his father's bull and roasts it over a fire made from the wood of the

Asherah pole. The next morning the neighbors rebel and are ready to stone the kid. But his dad has his back. And this is so important if we have a kid who is introverted and struggles with being social. The best thing is to let them know that we love and care about their struggles too. But here his dad argues for Gideon, "If Baal is real, then he can defend himself." This was the moment gained Gideon a nickname, "Jerub-Baal"—"Let Baal deal with it." Finally, there were a few more signs but with each step we can see Gideon growing more and more into his new role as Mighty Warrior.

Gideon started with "Mighty Warrior" when all he saw in himself at that time was "Mighty Thresher." "Look up" were two words in a moment when one would look down.

Three lessons. First, never underestimate what a few words can do. If there is anything we learn from being Christian its that Words have power. God created with mere words and saves us through His Word. Your words can build up or they can tear down.

Second, being introverted or extraverted is a character trait that will have a huge effect on us. Such things are to be wielded with care. Introverts and extraverts need each other to even one another out. Introverts who are reflective, meditate on things, can over analyze life to the point of paralysis. Extraverts may be fearless with people and quick to act, but can become impulsive or even too aggressive. Extraverts and introverts need each other to temper themselves and learn from one another.

Third, often others see more about us than we do. Gideon was afraid of the Midianites. Gideon doubted God's love. Still God calls to Gideon as Mighty Warrior. And along the way Gideon slowly develops into what God saw in him. Like a giant cargo carrier on the ocean the wheel was turned but the change in direction came slowly. The Lord looks at all of us as someone who has something to add to the body of Christ. The Lord looks at us not as mighty threshers, a person in the here and now, but also in the what will be. Likewise all it takes is a pastor to suggest that I might be a good choice to be a pastor. All it takes is just one or two with a few words of encouragement to shift our thinking to what may be possible. To an introvert two words can stick in our head for the rest of our lives.

"Look up." Perhaps those words are a good way to sum up Gideon's call. To look toward heaven. Look past what you are doing right now and see where things are going. Isn't that the point of hope in Jesus in general. Look up. Hope is not lost. It's just getting started.

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John 3:30