

# THE PRIZE: Under Pressure

## Session 1 – Great Expectations

### Leader's Guide

Featuring Kaká and Gideon

DVD – Start to 2:52

#### WARM-UP

Share with the group a time when you have felt under pressure. How did it make you feel? How did you respond?

#### TEAM HUDDLE

Kaká says that no team in football faces more pressure in the World Cup than Brazil. Do you think this is true?

What does Kaká identify as being the reasons for this high level of expectation among Brazilian fans?

Some of the reasons include:

- Football is a big part of the culture and everyone supports a team
- So many of the world's greatest players have come from Brazil
- Past success of the team (the nation has won an unprecedented 5 world titles!)

#### COACH'S CORNER

Read Judges 6:1–16

*The Israelites did evil in the Lord's sight. So the Lord handed them over to the Midianites for seven years.<sup>2</sup> The Midianites were so cruel that the Israelites made hiding places for themselves in the mountains, caves, and strongholds.<sup>3</sup> Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, marauders from Midian, Amalek, and the people of the east would attack Israel,<sup>4</sup> camping in the land and destroying crops as far away as Gaza. They left the Israelites with nothing to eat, taking all the sheep, goats, cattle, and donkeys.<sup>5</sup> These enemy hordes, coming with their livestock and tents, were as thick as locusts; they arrived on droves of camels too numerous to count. And they stayed until the land was stripped bare.<sup>6</sup> So Israel was reduced to starvation by the Midianites. Then the Israelites cried out to the Lord for help.*

*<sup>7</sup> When they cried out to the LORD because of Midian, <sup>8</sup> the LORD sent a prophet to the Israelites. He said, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of slavery in Egypt. <sup>9</sup> I rescued you from the Egyptians and from all who oppressed you. I drove out your enemies and gave you their land. <sup>10</sup> I told you, 'I am the LORD your God. You must not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you now live.' But you have not listened to me."*

*<sup>11</sup> Then the angel of the LORD came and sat beneath the great tree at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash of the clan of Abiezer. Gideon son of Joash was threshing wheat at the bottom of a winepress to hide the grain from the Midianites. <sup>12</sup> The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said, "Mighty hero, the LORD is with you!"*

*<sup>13</sup> "Sir," Gideon replied, "if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? And where are all the miracles our ancestors told us about? Didn't they say, 'The LORD brought us up out of Egypt'? But now the LORD has abandoned us and handed us over to the Midianites."*

*<sup>14</sup> Then the LORD turned to him and said, "Go with the strength you have, and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I am sending you!"*

*<sup>15</sup> "But Lord," Gideon replied, "how can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the whole tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least in my entire family!"*

*<sup>16</sup> The LORD said to him, "I will be with you. And you will destroy the Midianites as if you were fighting against one man."*

The Israelites had turned their backs on the God who had rescued them from slavery and they turned to other gods (vs. 1, 11). As a result, God disciplines them by allowing the Midianites to carry out regular raids that leave their crops and livestock decimated and the people fearing for their lives.

An angel of the LORD appears to Gideon and tells him that God is going to use him to free Israel from Midianite oppression (vs. 14). What do the following verses tell us about Gideon at the time God calls him?

- What is he doing when the angel appears to him (vs. 11)?
- What is his question to the angel (vs. 13)?
- How does he view himself and his background (vs. 15)?

vs. 11 – He is hiding in a winepress. He's not making wine, he's threshing wheat. In other words, he fears that the Midianites will attack and steal his crops. This tells us that Gideon is NOT full of courage.

vs. 13 – He questions whether God can do in the present what He did in the past, i.e. liberate His people from oppression. This tells us that Gideon is NOT full of faith.

vs. 15 – He reminds the angel that he is the youngest son, of the poorest family, of the weakest tribe in a defeated nation. He certainly doesn't feel qualified. This tells us that he is NOT full of confidence.

What reasons might we or other people give for thinking that God can't use me in a significant way?

Gideon may be lacking the things we think would be necessary to be used by God. However, God gives Gideon everything he requires to help him accomplish God's purposes. Can you identify the things that God gives to Gideon that enable him to become what God has called him to be (vs. 12, 14, 16)?

- A new identity ("Mighty hero" – vs. 12)
- The promise of God's presence ("The LORD is with you" - vs. 12, 16)
- A mission ("I am sending you" - vs. 14)
- Supernatural power ("You will destroy the Midianites as if you were fighting against one man" - vs. 16)
- A promise that his mission will ultimately be successful (see vs. 16 above)

What did Gideon have to do in response (vs. 14)?

He had to trust God, surrender and be obedient. He had to “go in the strength he had” (which as we have seen, wasn’t much) and trust God to do the rest.

Jesus said, *“You didn’t choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name.”* (John 15:16) In other words, Jesus has high expectations of us too. What do you think it means to bear fruit that will last?

What do you think God gives us to help us to “bear fruit”?

As followers of Jesus, we are privileged to have

- A new identity (1 Peter 2:9),
- A mission (Matthew 5:13-16, Matthew 28:18-20),
- The promise of God’s presence when on mission (Matthew 28:20),
- The power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8),
- The promise that our ministry will be fruitful/significant in God’s purposes (John 15:16, 1 Corinthians 15:58).

Gideon may not have been full of the things we think are necessary to be a spiritual champion. Yet in the end, Gideon’s story tells us that it’s not so much about what we give to God, but about what God gives to us that matters most! It is God’s contribution that makes the difference! As someone once said, “God doesn’t call the qualified, He qualifies the called.”

## WARM-DOWN

Spend time reflecting on what you have learned in this session. In particular, ask God to show you where and how He wants you to be serving His purposes right now. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you any areas where you might be making excuses. Invite the Holy Spirit to give you renewed confidence in God’s ability to do extra-ordinary things in and through you, just like He did with Gideon.

## EXTRA TRAINING

### Memory Verse

*“You didn’t choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name.”* (John 15:16)

### Prayer/Worship Focus

During the coming week spend time reading the rest of Gideon’s story (Judges, chapters 6-8). Thank God for the way He was able to turn Gideon’s weakness to strength. (Hebrews 11:34). Invite the Holy Spirit to enter your areas of weakness and vulnerability so that God can be glorified in and through your life. Pray for opportunities to be used by God in “word and deed” following this time of study and prayer. Remember that God has great expectations of you because He is able to work in and through you!

### Putting It into Practice

Make a commitment to pray regularly for three friends, relatives, teammates, work colleagues or neighbors who don’t know Jesus or who need to experience His love in action. Ask God to help you to show His love and to give you opportunities to share the good news about Jesus with them.