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**A NOTE FROM  
PASTOR DAVID**

The book of Judges is messy. It can be bloody. It can be disturbing. And it can be complicated for our modern minds to understand. However, this ancient book can also give us a tremendous amount of wisdom and insight if we take the time to look.

For the next few weeks, we will peer into the murky depths of human nature and watch a people struggle with their identity in some strange and fascinating ways. Along the way, we will meet some people who seem to have the potential to save the day. However in the end, they prove to be broken saviors that cannot deliver.

In fact, if you look closely, the refrain that keeps popping up in the book of Judges is that “there was no king in those days.” This is interesting, especially in a book about judges that was set hundreds of years before Saul was crowned king and the monarchy began in Israel. However, the reason for this is that the book of Judges really isn’t about judges; it is about a King who was coming to do what they could not do. Everything that the judges were supposed to do for the people — to deliver them from enemies, provide peace, instill unity, give direction, speak God’s words — are all met in Jesus, the truer and greater Judge and King.

We created this guide as a companion that will enhance your personal study of Judges. Work through this guide on your own before the weekly sermons and small groups. Then bring your answers with you on Sunday, where there will be a discussion based on the observations and discoveries you have made throughout the week.

Remember, the stories and truths within this book are not just archaic tales with no relevance for us today. Rather, each chapter unpacks the truth of God’s grace in the midst of human wickedness, and shows how only the true Judge and King can redeem His people and the world.

Excited to study God’s Word with you,  
David Barrett



## SMALL GROUP LEADERS

Small groups are designed to provide the context and resources to help every person at Faith Fellowship take their next step as followers of Jesus, even if their first step is their next step.

To take steps towards this goal, we use four small group rhythms. These rhythms create the contexts where we grow in different aspects of being a disciple of Jesus. Each rhythm provides a designated time to focus on one aspect of disciple-making instead of trying to do everything at once. Additionally, the rhythms create the perfect opportunity for group leaders to raise up others in their group to lead in specific ways, creating an environment where potentially every member of the small group is engaged in making the group happen.

### **Bible Study**

Bible Study is a time to read, study, and apply the Word of God together. We believe that intentionally growing in knowledge of God's Word in community is the key for community and individual growth as a disciple of Jesus.

### **D-Group**

Discipleship Group (D-group) occurs on the fourth week of the month. D-Group is a time to apply the gospel to our hearts and grow deeper in the gospel through community. The overall goal of D-group is to continue to foster discipleship relationships that help each person grow to become more like Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit and to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

### **Family Time**

Family time creates an informal space for having fun and eating together as a small group. When Jesus instituted the church, he created a spiritual family. The goal of the family time is to move a group from acquaintances to family, from those with shared interests to those who love and care for one another. The deeper our relationships grow, the better we will be able to apply the gospel in one another's lives.

### **Missional Hangout**

Missional Hangouts are informal and fun gatherings that allow small groups to invest in their non-Christian friends together. Think of them as your group hosting a party for all of your non-Christian friends, neighbors, coworkers, and family. They can be dinner out, board games in, a book club in your house, or catching an Astro's game. Whatever you choose to do, the purpose is for each member of your group to invite a non-Christian friend to attend

*For more ideas and resources on leading a small group well, check out [faithfellowshipfortbend.com/pipeline](https://faithfellowshipfortbend.com/pipeline)*



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

*As we explore the book of Judges together, our discipleship team has provided additional resources to equip you to go deeper into this incredible book. These are also available in on our website at [faithfellowshipfortbend.com/judges](http://faithfellowshipfortbend.com/judges)*

### **Articles and Overviews**

On the following pages, you will find articles and overviews that will help you better the major theological themes of the book of Judges. Judges is a complex and often confusing book so we encourage you to take time to walk through these resources to prepare for the series.

### **Faith at Home**

The Faith at Home initiative is all about helping you create or continue an environment of spiritual growth in your home. For this series in Judges, we have given you practical next steps at the end of each small group guide to make it easier and more likely for you to bring the truths that you have learned on Sunday into the week. These next steps are categorized into the themes of home, hospitality, and hammers:

- **For Your Home:** These next steps are designed to equip you to have a great marriage shaped by the greatness of God and His Gospel. These are also intended to equip you to be an intentional parent or grandparent in order to launch your kids into the world with deep affection and endless wonder for God.
- **For Your Hospitality:** These next steps are to inspire you to be a good neighbor and work for the good of your community even when it is hard.
- **For You as a Hammer:** These next steps are tools that God can use to shape and build you from the decent cottage that you thought you would be into the palace that He wants you to become.

For more information and context on Faith at Home, consider the resources or listen to our Faith at Home sermon series at [faithfellowshipfortbend.com/faithathome](http://faithfellowshipfortbend.com/faithathome)

### **Spiritual Disciplines: Explore and Experiment**

As Richard Foster puts it in the opening lines of *The Celebration of Discipline*, “The desperate need for today is not a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people.” As believers, Jesus calls us to move beyond superficial, surface living and dive into the depths and inner caverns of the spiritual realm. We are called to live in the deep — to be a people of the deep — because the deep is where the enjoyment and satisfaction of the good life that God offers is found.

At the end of each week in our journey through Judges, we have provided an opportunity for you to explore and experiment with a spiritual discipline throughout the week. With some of these you might be familiar, while others you might feel are a bit mysterious. Consider these suggestions and practices a way into the deeper, uncharted waters of your faith.

## **Judges Reading Plan**

As we often say, when life cuts us, we want to bleed God's Word. We want you so filled with Scripture so saturated with Scripture that you can't help but talk about it, share it, and apply it. The book of Judges is quite long. In order to get the most out of your study of the book, it's worth reading intentionally through the whole thing. The reading plan offers the chance to read through Judges during the week. The plan includes three-five days of reading each week that you can distribute in the way that best fits your schedule.

As you read, we encourage you to use the H.E.A.R. method. Engaging the text in this way will help you better understand and discuss the Scripture with your small group.

- **Highlight:** Read and observe everything in the passage.
- **Explain:** Based on your reading, discover what the passage means in its context.
- **Apply:** Understand how the meaning of the passage affects your life.
- **Respond in Prayer:** Pray God's word back to him, asking to believe, share, and put the Bible into practice in your life and relationships.

Feel free to interact with the Scripture at your own pace throughout the week. Remember to interact with the Scripture and think through the discussion questions before you're small group meets. In small groups, we'll discuss what we learned from the Scripture the previous week as well as our answers to the discussion questions together.

## **Spotify Playlist**

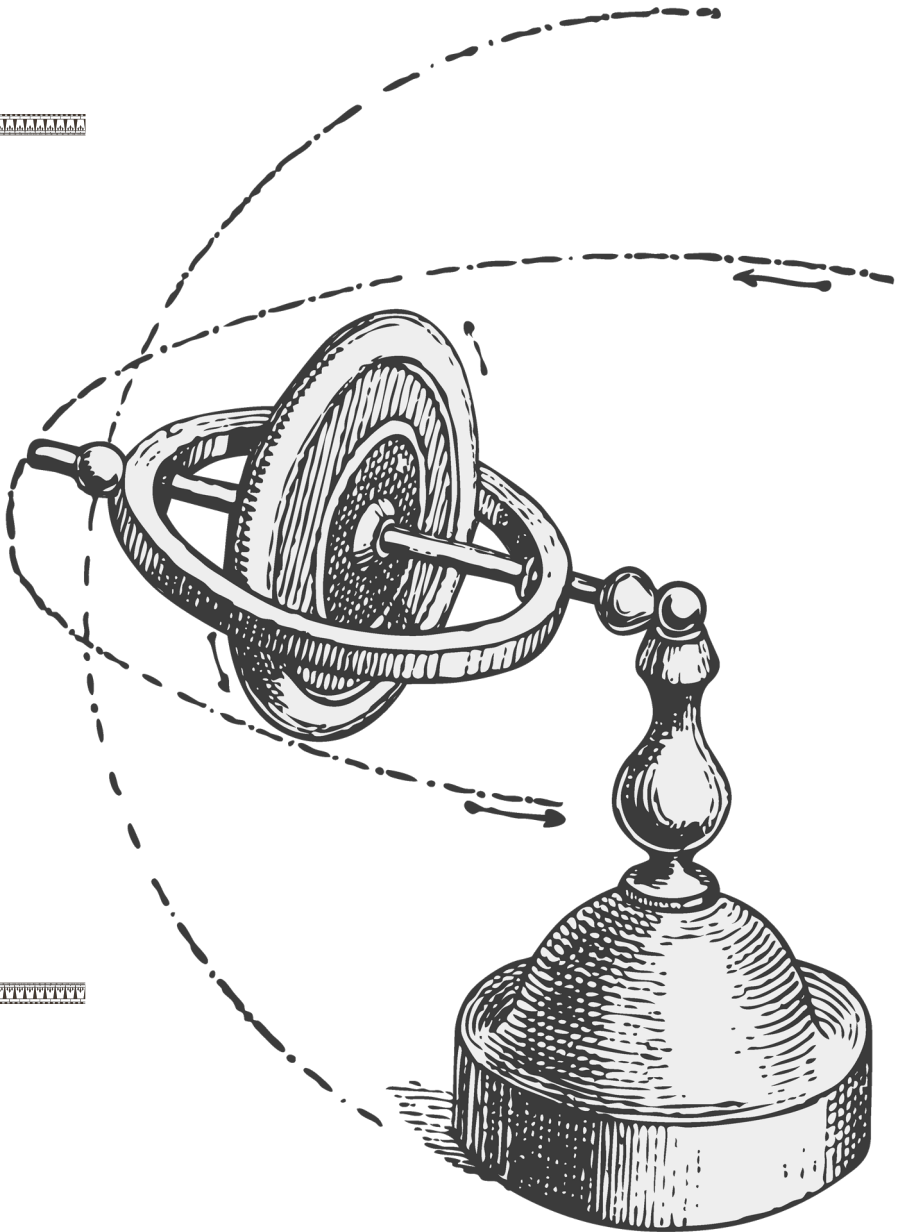
Songs are like sermons that you don't forget. We have curated a playlist called "*Songs for Judges*" that reflect the themes of the series. Also in this playlist are songs that we will be singing during the worship service for the next few months. We encourage you to listen to these songs for your own edification and better corporate worship. You can find the playlist posted to Spotify (@faith fellowship church) or on our website at [www.faithfellowshipfortbend.com/music](http://www.faithfellowshipfortbend.com/music)

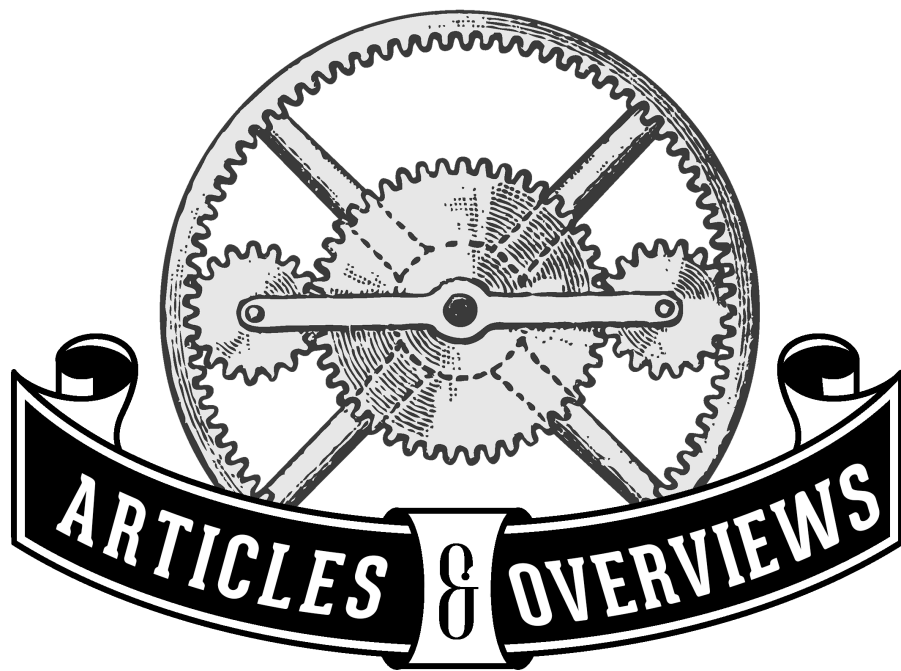
# SERIES OVERVIEW

Our study of the book of Judges will last for much of the Spring. Consider the following schedule that details how we will approach this incredibly rich book. Remember, that this schedule is also available on our website at [faithfellowshipfortbend.com/judges](http://faithfellowshipfortbend.com/judges)



<b>February 20</b>	Judges 1:1-2:5
<b>February 27</b>	Judges 2:6-3:5
<b>March 6</b>	Judges 3:7-31
<b>March 13</b>	Judges 4:1-5:31
<b>March 20</b>	Judges 6:1-40
<b>March 27</b>	Judges 7:1-25
<b>April 3</b>	Judges 8:1-10:5
<b>April 10</b>	Easter
<b>April 17</b>	Easter
<b>April 24</b>	Judges 10:6-12:15
<b>May 1</b>	Judges 13:1-25
<b>May 8</b>	Judges 14:1-16:31
<b>May 15</b>	Judges 17:1-18:31
<b>May 22</b>	Judges 19:1-21:25





**These articles and overviews will help you better understand the themes of the book of Judges. This is a complex and often confusing book so we encourage you to take time to walk through these resources to enrich your personal study of this incredibly rich and practical piece of Scripture.**

# - OVERVIEW -

## THE BOOK OF JUDGES

### Author and Date

Nowhere in Scripture is an author of this book named. The events in Judges took place in the period between Joshua's death and the rise of Samuel and Saul. Most of the book was likely written by David's time (1010–970 B.C.).

### Theme

The theme of Judges is the downward spiral of Israel's national and spiritual life into chaos and rebellion against God, showing the need for a godly king (17:6; 21:25).

### Purpose and Pattern

The book of Judges was written to show the consequences of religious unfaithfulness and to point the way to a king who, if righteous, would lead the people to God. In the book of Joshua, the people of Israel seemed to want to follow the Lord and obey his commands. The book of Judges reveals, however, that the people had been rebelling even in Joshua's time. This disobedience continued and grew more serious throughout the period of the judges. As summarized in Judges 2:16–23, time and again Israel turned its back on God and embraced the gods and ways of the Canaanites. Israel's history unfolds in a repetitive way, with each cycle taking Israel further away from God.

### Key Themes

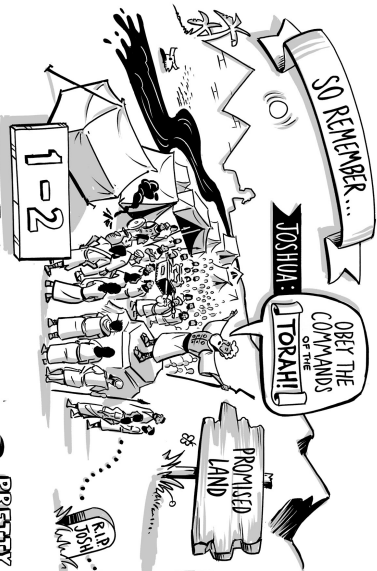
- Israel's existence in the land, which had been promised by God, was threatened by its continuing rebellion. Israel had not conquered the land completely (ch. 1), because of its unfaithfulness (2:1–3, 20–22). Therefore, the day would come when the nation would be taken captive, away from the land (18:30).
- The oppressions, chaos, and generally negative picture in the book are due to Israel's repeated sin. Time and again the Israelites broke the covenant, turning to the Canaanite gods and "doing evil" (2:3, 11–13, 17, 19; 3:6, 7, 12; 4:1; 6:1, 10; 8:24–27, 33; 10:6; 13:1; 17:6; 21:25), and they repeatedly suffered the consequences.
- Despite Israel's repeated falling away, God in his faithfulness continually delivered them. This was not due to Israel's merits or its repentance. Instead it was because of God's compassion and pity (2:16, 18) and his faithfulness to his promises to Abraham (Deut. 6:10–11; compare Gen. 12:7; 15:7, 18–21; 26:2–3; 35:12).
- The judges were not able to stop the peoples' unfaithfulness. If anything, they made it worse. Major judges such as Gideon (8:24–27), Jephthah (11:30–31, 34–40), and Samson (chs. 14–16) were guilty of significant sin. The shining exception was Othniel and Deborah (chs. 4–5).
- Israel needed a godly king to lead it in doing right in the Lord's eyes rather than a leader who "did what was right in his own eyes" (compare 17:6; 21:25). God had promised from the beginning that there would be kings (Gen. 17:6, 16; 35:11; 49:10), and had explained what a godly king would look like (Deut. 17:14–20). The book of Judges shows the depths to which the people of Israel descended in the absence of a godly king.

### Outline

- The Roots of Israel's Unfaithfulness (1:1–3:6)
- The Downward Spiral of Israel's Unfaithfulness (3:7–16:31)
- The Depths of Israel's Unfaithfulness (17:1–21:25)



- OVERVIEW -  
BIBLE PROJECT POSTER



# JUDGES

ISRAEL'S TOTAL FAILURE

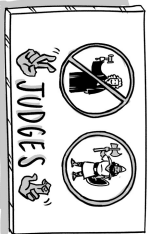
3-16

PRETTY GOOD

OKAY

BAD

WORSE

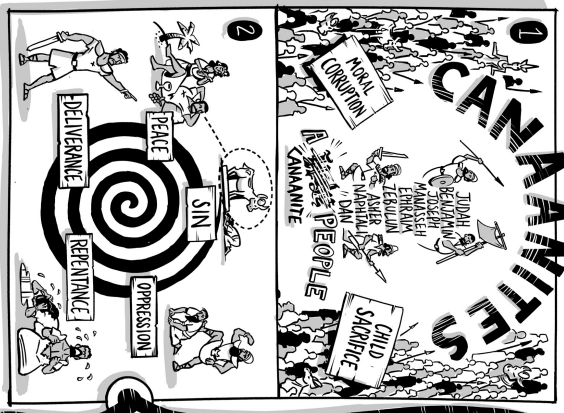


THE EQUIVOCALITY OF GOD'S SPIRIT  
≠  
ENDORSEMENT OF EVIL CHOICES

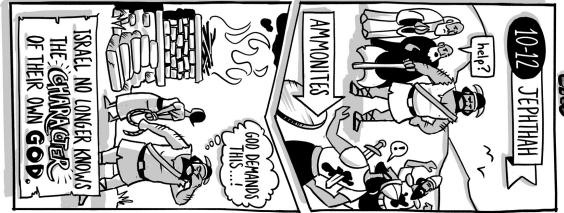
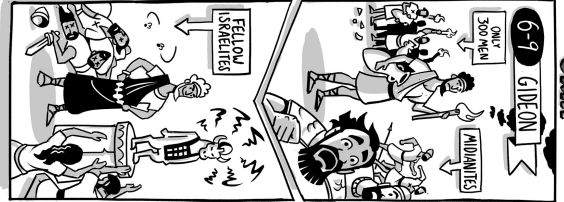
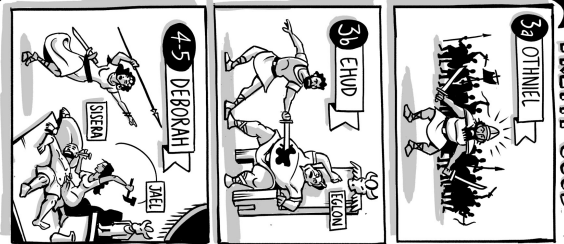


17-21

created by the Bible Project



ISRAEL FAILS TO DRIVE OUT THE CANANITES



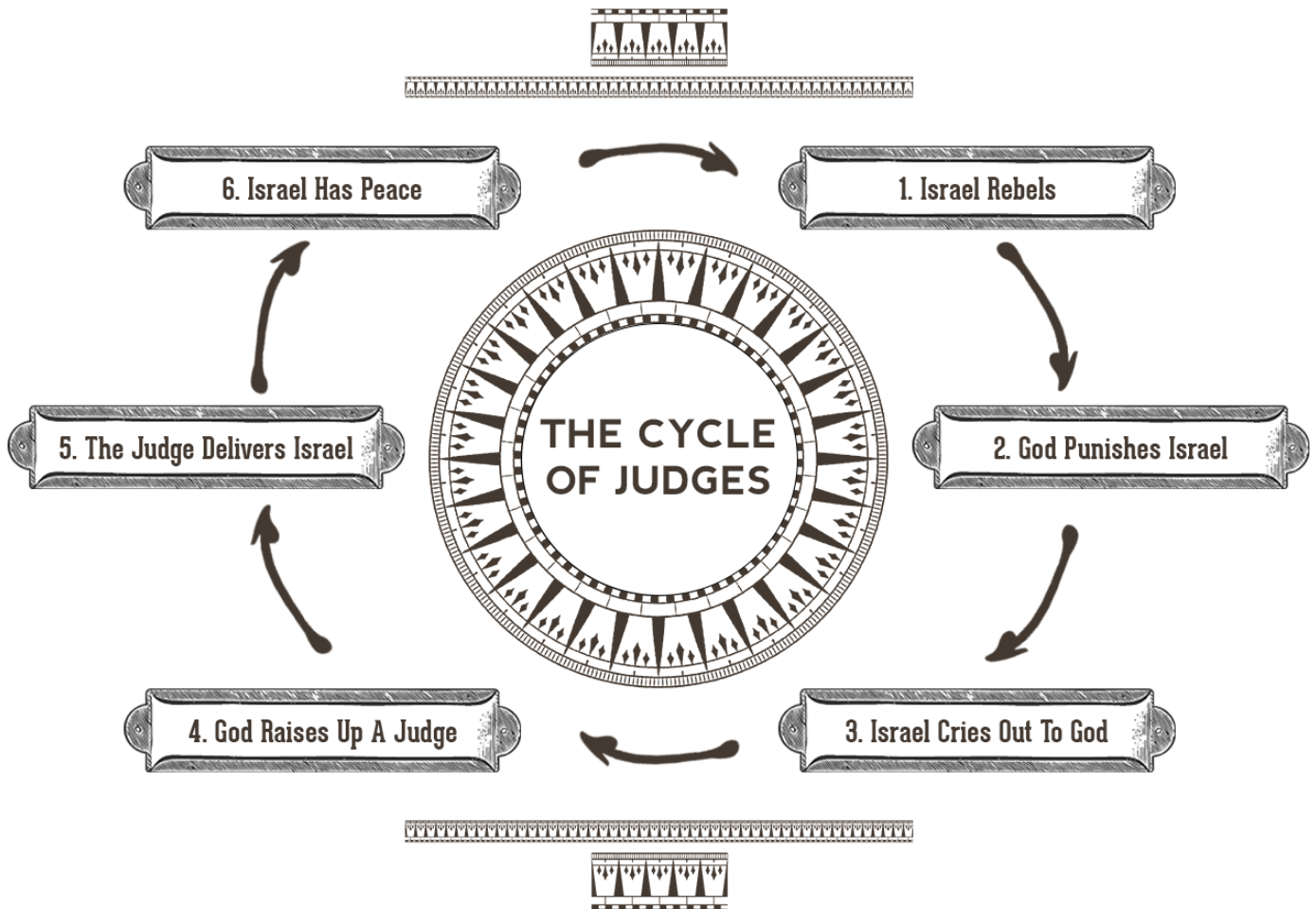
CORRUPTION OF ISRAEL'S JUDGES



CORRUPTION OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL

- OVERVIEW -  
**THE CYCLE OF JUDGES**

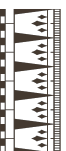
The 12 judges in the book of Judges are more akin to “tribal leaders” than political or legal decision-makers. The judges’ main function is to deliver the Israelites from the oppression of the surrounding nations. The repeated cycle of Judges illustrated below occurs nine times. Israel’s behavior gets worse and worse with every cycle as they forget that God is the source of both their correction and their deliverance. By the end of the book, things are so bad that it is clear that no human being can bring lasting peace, either in the world or in people’s hearts.



- OVERVIEW -

## THE DETAILS OF EACH CYCLE

	<b>3:7-11</b>	<b>3:12-30</b>	<b>3:31</b>	<b>4:1-5:31</b>	<b>6:1-8:32</b>	<b>8:34-10:5</b>	<b>10:6-12:7</b>	<b>12:8-15</b>	<b>13:1-16:31</b>
<b>Worshipped...</b>	Baals, Asherah	Unspecified idols		Unspecified idols	Baals, Asherah	Baal-Berith	Baal, Asheroth		Unspecified idols
<b>Given by God over to...</b>	Cushan-Rishathaim	Eglon of Moab	Philistines	Jabin/Sisera of Canaan	Midian	Abimelech	Philistines, Ammonites		Philistines
<b>For a duration of...</b>	8 years	18 years		20 years	7 years	3 years	18 years		40 years
<b>How bad?</b>	Subjected	Took tribute		Cruelly oppressed	Had to live in caves		Crushed — great distress		Near complete integration
<b>Does Israel cry out?</b>	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	No	Yes		No
<b>Judge...</b>	Othniel	Ehud	Shamgar	Deborah/ Barak	Gideon	Tola, Jair	Jephthah	Ibsan, Elon, Abdon	Samson
<b>From the tribe/ clan of...</b>	Judah	Benjamin		Ephraim/ Naphtali	Mannasseh	Issachar/ Gilead	Gilead	Judah/ Zebulun/ Ephraim	Dan
<b>Supported by...</b>	All Israel	All Israel		Zebulun, Naphtali	300 men		Gilead, Mannasseh		No one
<b>Victory?</b>	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes		Yes		No
<b>Peace?</b>	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes, but with idol worship		No		No
<b>Duration of judges rule...</b>	40 years	80 years		40 years	40 years	45 years total	6 years	25 years total	20 years



- ARTICLE -

## HOW TO READ JUDGES

### **Remember the underlying THEME: God's mercy.**

Judges is filled with violence, intrigue, civil war, abuse, power-grabs, and generally horrific actions. However, when his wayward people cried out to him, God sent a deliverer to give his people peace. This is the mercy of a loving Father who warned his people about their behavior and watched in pain as they repeatedly returned to destructive cycles. Through all of this however, God continued to pursue his people and extend mercy. In fact, by the end of the book of Judges, in his mercy God changed how he related to his people. The first few chapters of the next book, 1 Samuel, finishes the story of Judges and starts the time of kings ruling Israel. Why the change? If the people cannot stay true to God's laws, perhaps one man can — the king?

### **Identify the PATTERN: The cycles of idolatry.**

Think of the 12 judges in these stories more as “tribal leaders” than as political or legal decision-makers. The judges' main function was to deliver the Israelites from the oppression of one of the surrounding nations. The repeated cycle of Judges (which occurs nine times throughout the book) can be described simply as “rebellion-retribution-repentance-rescue.” Israel's behavior gets worse and worse with every cycle as they forget that God is their true Judge and Leader.

### **Understand the GENRE: Narrative history.**

Judges is a history book with an overarching theological point to make. It is important to understand that there is little redeeming value in most of the characters and their actions. This is not a book of heroes; it is a book about how bad things can get when people stop obeying God and do “whatever seems right in their own eyes” (Judges 21:25). The relevance of reading Judges today is seeing the different ways the Israelites found to destroy their own souls. When they were not paying attention to God, they looked to power, sex, approval of others, self-righteousness, and false religion to fill their lives. We may not attach a little wooden figurine (a literal “idol”) to what we are doing, but our society is filled with this same idolatry. The results then and now are devastating, and God's own people finish the book of Judges with a total descent into madness and an ensuing civil war.

### **See the TRUE JUDGE.**

At Faith Fellowship, we believe that “All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.”<sup>1</sup> That means that all Scripture points to Jesus. But how can we find Jesus in the pages of a book like Judges? Here's how: Israel's “heroes” are deeply broken and flawed men, and when left to their own devices, all hell breaks loose. However, God's mercy prevails, and his people make it through a very dark era. The reason that God showed mercy instead of judgment because the true Judge of Israel was perfect — and he was broken to remove our flaws and brokenness. Everything that the judges were supposed to do for the people — to deliver them from enemies, provide peace, instill unity, give direction, speak God's words — are all met in Jesus. His Kingdom is here and it is coming, and his deliverance is permanent.

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<sup>1</sup> Baptist Faith and Message 2000

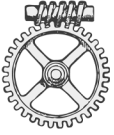






## **PART ONE**

**We want to provide the context and resources to help every person at Faith Fellowship take their next step as followers of Jesus, even if their first step is their next step. Consider these guides that will walk you through the book of Judges in personal as well as corporate study.**



**February 13**  
**Judges Overview**

**Sermon Notes**



**- EXPLORE AND EXPERIMENT -**  
**SPIRITUAL FORMATION INDEX**

This Spiritual Formation Index is an invitation to allow God to search your thoughts and begin to recalibrate your heart. While a tool like this can never truly assess the interiority of your heart, it can give a glimpse of where you are at a particular moment in time because it reveals the progress of an organic, invisible process we call spiritual formation. These measurements don't force growth to happen; they reveal where you are and where you hope to be next time you get measured. Think of it like taking your blood pressure as a measure of your health. If you take the assessment in another six months, you may be able to see where the invisible process of formation is producing fruit in your life.

This is important to know: there is no one-size-fits-all program — only the invitation to recognize where God is at work and calling you into the deeper waters of faith. This spiritual formation index will not measure behavior or chart standards of excellence. It cannot assess your qualification for leadership, your talents or your ministry skills. It won't account for the fruit of the Spirit in your life, nor will it fix your heart. This assessment can, however, put you in touch with a desire for God that translates into fuel and fire for the spiritual journey.

This particular inventory, adapted from Adele Calhoun's excellent book *Handbook of Spiritual Disciplines*, is designed around the acronym WORSHIP. Each letter of the word *worship* represents a way that we can experience God and grow in our spiritual formation. The assessment on the following pages will help you take inventory of your own progress in spiritual formation and, hopefully, help you grow more deeply in your faith in and worship of God as we walk through Judges together.

**Complete the Spiritual Formation Index on the following pages and record your score totals.**

	<b>Score</b>
<b>W</b> orship God	
<b>O</b> pen Yourself Up To God	
<b>R</b> elinquish False Idols	
<b>S</b> hare Your Life	
<b>H</b> ear God's Word	
<b>I</b> ncarnate the Love of Christ	
<b>P</b> ray Your Life	

Look back over the Spiritual Formation Index and your life as a worshiper. They reveal areas of desire, neglect and need. Consider who you want to become. At the end of each week in our journey through Judges, we have provided an opportunity for you to explore and experiment with a spiritual discipline that corresponds to each of these categories.

## Worship God

Fill out the chart below using the following guide:

1 = not true

2 = needs improvement

3 = most of the time

4 = consistently true.

	1	2	3	4
I am aware of God's presence in my life, confident of his love for me and intentionally celebrate our connection.				
Worshiping with fellow believers gives me a deep sense of joy and God's presence.				
I take time to celebrate God and acknowledge my limits by deeply entering into a weekly sabbath day that is different from every other day.				
I am aware of where I place people, experiences and images before God.				
I am a joyful, thankful person who expresses gratitude to God and others easily and often.				

**Total Score:** \_\_\_\_\_

Take note of which desire most resonates with you and produces a longing to go deeper with God in this particular category.

### Questions for Consideration

- Am I celebrating the love and glory of God with reverence and joy?
- Where am I longing to move into deeper celebration of God?

## Open Yourself to God

Fill out the chart below using the following guide:

1 = not true

2 = needs improvement

3 = most of the time

4 = consistently true.

	1	2	3	4
I regularly and intentionally make space in my life for prayerfully listening to God at home, at work and with others.				
I can admit my mistakes, weaknesses and growing edges to God as well as others.				
I enjoy time spent alone with God in quiet reflection.				
I recognize and live freely within my limits. I pay attention to my feelings, my body, my losses and my needs.				
I don't need to be doing something for God or others in order to feel good about myself.				

**Total Score:** \_\_\_\_\_

Take note of which desire most resonates with you and produces a longing to go deeper with God in this particular category.

### Questions for Consideration

- How am I opening myself up to God in deeper ways?
- Where do I want to let go of defenses and busyness so I can become more open to God's activity in my life?

## Relinquish False Idols

Fill out the chart below using the following guide:

1 = not true

2 = needs improvement

3 = most of the time

4 = consistently true.

	1	2	3	4
I am aware of my sin and blind spots and how they hurt others. I easily apologize to others and seek to live out of my true self in Christ.				
I am able to leave the crowded, noisy world of acclaim and doing behind, retreating into silence and solitude with God and letting him restore me.				
I recognize the voice and activity of the Holy Spirit in my life.				
I recognize my addictions and compulsions, and am committed to living free of them.				
I take time to carefully discern when my plans and ambitions are legitimately for the glory of God and when they cross the line into my own desire for greatness or approval.				

**Total Score:** \_\_\_\_\_

Take note of which desire most resonates with you and produces a longing to go deeper with God in this particular category.

### Questions for Consideration

- How am I growing in self-awareness and becoming more authentic in my relationships?
- Where do I want to let go of secondary things so that I can be more authentic in my relationship with God and others?

## Sharing Your Life

Fill out the chart below using the following guide:

1 = not true

2 = needs improvement

3 = most of the time

4 = consistently true.

	1	2	3	4
I have a relationship with someone who helps me grow in my spiritual walk.				
I feel comfortable opening my home, my heart, my faith and my life to people not in my family.				
I am not judgmental toward others. I know how to make peace and deal with anger in constructive ways. I am not argumentative and contentious.				
Others describe me as honest, vulnerable, open and approachable.				
I am not hypersensitive and easily offended. I give and receive love freely and easily.				

**Total Score:** \_\_\_\_\_

Take note of which desire most resonates with you and produces a longing to go deeper with God in this particular category.

### Questions for Consideration

- Am I connecting with God and others in a caring, healthy community?
- How am I hoping that the people of my local church will contribute to my spiritual formation?

## Hearing God's Word

Fill out the chart below using the following guide:

1 = not true

2 = needs improvement

3 = most of the time

4 = consistently true.

	1	2	3	4
I am growing in biblical literacy and know how scriptural truth intersects with my life.				
On a regular basis I am nourished by spending time with God and his Word.				
The Bible is alive and interesting to me.				
I have a plan for reading Scripture.				
I regularly study, meditate, memorize, or listen to the Bible with other people (with a spouse, small group, accountability group, etc).				

**Total Score:** \_\_\_\_\_

Take note of which desire most resonates with you and produces a longing to go deeper with God in this particular category.

### Questions for Consideration

- Do I want to connect more deeply with God and His Word? How so?
- Am I cultivating the knowledge of God, the character of Christ and the presence of the Spirit in my life?

## Incarnate Christ's Love

Fill out the chart below using the following guide:

1 = not true

2 = needs improvement

3 = most of the time

4 = consistently true.

	1	2	3	4
I work for justice and have a heart for the dispossessed and needy that is visible to others.				
I am just and fair in dealing with others. I honor my contracts and commitments, even if they inconvenience me.				
I know my gifts and contribute them to the kingdom of God. I am more concerned about building God's kingdom than my own.				
The fruit of the Spirit is more and more evident in my life.				
People with problems, needs, sorrows and losses seek me out. They know I care.				

**Total Score:** \_\_\_\_\_

Take note of which desire most resonates with you and produces a longing to go deeper with God in this particular category.

### Questions for Consideration

- How am I giving myself and my resources away to God and others?
- Am I a good steward of my God-given gifts for the growth of Christ's kingdom?

## Pray Your Life

Fill out the chart below using the following guide:

1 = not true

2 = needs improvement

3 = most of the time

4 = consistently true.

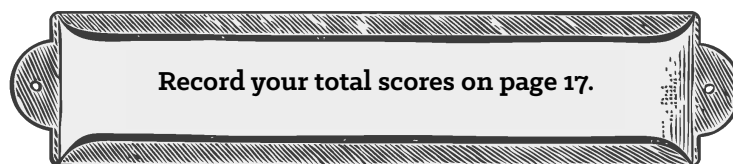
	1	2	3	4
It's easy for me to get around to prayer.				
My prayer life is <b>not</b> mostly about myself and my needs.				
I am able to authentically pray my emotions, losses, anger, doubts and desires. I feel comfortable telling God all the 'good, bad and ugly' in me.				
I am comfortable praying out loud with others.				
I am aware of how God speaks to me, and I know how to listen to God and recognize his voice.				

**Total Score:** \_\_\_\_\_

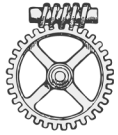
Take note of which desire most resonates with you and produces a longing to go deeper with God in this particular category.

### Questions for Consideration

- Am I attending to God's activity in my life and listening to him on a regular basis?
- Where do I want to connect with God more deeply? What does this look like?

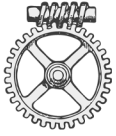






**February 20**  
**Judges 1:1-2:5**

**Sermon Notes**



# February 20

Judges 1:1-2:5

Personal and Small Group Guide

## Session Big Idea

Though God's people fall into disbelief, idolatry, and apostasy, God remains faithful and will bring about a plan of deliverance from the enemies of his people.

## Read Judges 1:1-4

What does God promise to the tribe of Judah as they fight against the Canaanites? What does that show about God's faithfulness—both to Abraham and the entire people of Israel?

## Read Judges 1:19-21

What do Judah and Benjamin fail to do?

Why does God want complete devotion from his people? Why would the presence of godless nations in and around Israel threaten that complete devotion?

## Read Judges 2:1-5

How had Israel fallen short of being fully devoted to God? What does it look like in your life to be fully devoted to God? How does that compare to a life that's divided between God and other things?

What areas of your life are difficult for you to offer to God? Why are those areas particularly hard for you to give up?

## Faith at Home

Select an activity below to complete before next week.

**Home:** Is there someone in your family who is struggling with an area of life where God has called him or her to challenging obedience. Be intentional about making time to speak words of hope and comfort to them to build them up in bold obedience this week.

**Hammers:** Memorize the cycle of the judges this week. It will be helpful tool as you go through the rest of Judges. You can find a copy on page 10-11.

**Explore and Experiment:** Consider the description and suggestion for the spiritual discipline of the gratitude on the next page. Grace is opposed to earning, not effort. Give this spiritual discipline a try this week and see what God will do through it in your life.

## Reading Plan

### Judges 1:1-2:5

**Day One:** 1:1-15

**Day Two:** 1:16-26

**Day Three:** 1:27-36

**Day Four:** 2:1-5

- WORSHIP GOD -

## DISCIPLINE OF GRATITUDE

Paul reminded the Ephesian church to “addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:19-20). Gratitude, like singing, seems to be a choice that we make.

Thankfulness is a thread that can bind together all the seemingly errant, patchwork pieces of our lives. Difficult times, happy days, seasons of sickness, hours of joy—all can be sewn together into something lovely with the thread of thankfulness. This is possible not because everything goes perfectly but because God is present. As God is present in our songs of worship, so he is present in our words of gratitude.

### **Definition of Practicing Gratitude**

Gratitude is a loving and thankful response toward God for his presence with us and within this world. Though “blessings” can move us into gratitude, it is not at the root of a thankful heart. Delight in God and his good will is the heartbeat of thankfulness.

### **Purpose of Practicing Gratitude**

To be sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s prompting to live with a grateful heart, cognizant of God’s work in my life and my abundant resources

### **Practicing Gratitude Could Include...**

- Beginning a gratitude journal by keeping a record of the “abundance” God has given you. Next to each abundance write what it means to you to have a God who interacts and intervenes in your life.
- Ending every day by saying thank you to God for at least one thing.
- Writing a letter of thanks to someone who has touched your life in the past year, the past month, the past week.
- Getting a current hardship firmly in mind. How do you feel about this hardship? Tell the truth to God. Where is there evidence of God’s presence in this hardship? Is there anything you can be thankful for?
- Curating the sorts of things tend to encourage you in thankfulness. Praise songs? Worship? Time spent with friends? Giving and receiving presents? Plan ways of incorporating the things that encourage thankfulness into your life on a regular basis.
- Noticing your tendency to make comparisons that result in feelings of dissatisfaction or entitlement. Practice abstaining from comparative statements about what you don’t have. Instead give thanks for what you do have.

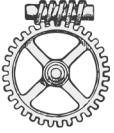
### **The God-Given Fruit of Practicing Gratitude Is...**

- Keeping company with Christ no matter what happens.
- Curbing critical tendencies by overcoming them with thanksgiving.
- Seeing what you have as quickly as you see what you don’t have.
- Treasuring and valuing people by thanking them often and clearly for who they are to you or to someone else.
- Receiving everything you have as a gift rather than as an entitlement.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us (Transforming Resources)* (p. 30). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

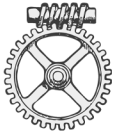




**February 27**

**Judges 2:6-3:5**

**Sermon Notes**



# February 27

Judges 2:6-3:5

Personal and Small Group Guide

## Session Big Idea

Though God's people fall into disbelief, idolatry, and apostasy, God remains faithful and will bring about a plan of deliverance from the enemies of his people.

## Read Judges 2:6-10

When he died, Joshua was remembered as a leader who led the people to serve the Lord faithfully. What would be your spiritual epitaph? In what ways are you living out your calling as a servant of the Lord?

If you are a parent or grandparent, how are you passing on your faith to your children? What has encouraged and challenged you? If you are not a parent or grandparent, how are you praying for and sharing your faith with children in our church?

## Read Judges 2:11-15

"Spiritual amnesia leads to spiritual apostasy." How is this statement true for the Israelites?

Israel quickly forgot the mighty works of God and his faithfulness to them—it only takes one generation. When has God worked mightily in your life? What did you learn from that situation? What happens when you forget the lesson you learned from that experience?

What do you do [or can you start to do] to remember what God's done for you?

## Read Judges 2:16-23

How does God's provision of judges also show his faithfulness? What reason would God have to choose to save Israel, even though they continued to sin against him?

What could it look like to live your life as a reflection of God's faithfulness to you? What would change? What would stay the same? How could you live fully devoted to God this week?

## Faith at Home

Select an activity below to complete before next week.

**Hammer:** Ask God to show you the areas of your life that aren't completely devoted to him this week. Pray that God would lead you to repentance.

**Hospitality:** Talk with a Christian friend this week about what it means to compromise your beliefs for the things of the world. Discuss if that's been happening in your life and pray for each other.

**Explore and Experiment:** Consider the description and suggestion for the spiritual discipline of the Examen on the next page. Grace is opposed to earning, not effort. Give this spiritual discipline a try this week and see what God will do through it in your life.

## Reading Plan

### Judges 2:6-3:5

Day One: 2:6-10

Day Two: 2:11-15

Day Three: 2:16-23

Day Four: 3:1-6

## - OPEN YOURSELF UP TO GOD -

# THE EXAMEN

In the very first sentence of the monumental *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin says that there is no knowledge of God without knowledge of self. Wisdom, he says, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.

I can attest to the veracity of this foundational statement. I remember a time in college when I had lost my way a bit and needed to make some difficult decisions about where my life was going. So, armed with a Bible, a granola bar, and Rich Mullins *Liturgy, Legacy and a Ragamuffin Band* CD, I ventured into Payne's Prairie Preserve State Park just outside of Gainesville, FL to find answers.

After a day of searching and solitude, I found them. Interestingly though, the answers that I found were not just in what God revealed to me about Himself but rather in what God revealed to me about myself. That day in the woods, between avoiding alligators and Eastern Diamondbacks, and in the stillness of searching my soul, God began to show me hard truths and deeper things about where my life was going and why it was going that way.

I didn't have the particular of the Prayer of Examen then, but over the years I've used this tool as a means of searching my soul and situation to find answers in the same way that I did so many years ago in the swamps of Florida. If you are looking for answers about your soul and situation, consider the framework of the Prayer of Examen below. Using it can be a step toward wisdom and as Calvin says, greater knowledge of God and of ourselves.

### **What is the Prayer of Examen?**

The Prayer of Examen is a practice based on Paul's letter to the Corinthians where he said that Christians would examine their conscience before taking the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:28). Christians throughout the ages have practiced some version of it. The practice walks through a process of reflection: examining conscience and actions while paying attention to the ways that sin and selfish desires have hold of us.

As we look deep within ourselves and pay attention to the ways we've hurt others or hurt ourselves, what often comes to light are things we typically try to avoid — fear and anxiety, anger and bitterness, shame and sadness. And yet, instead of avoiding these emotions, in this practice of examination we summon the courage to push further into them in order to be free of them. In this way, we can deal honestly with what's inside us, with what draws us away from God and the good life He offers, and so experience God's love and mercy even in the deepest, darkest of places.

### **Three Movements**

The Prayer of Examen is a practice contains three movements: Examination, Confession, and Assurance

#### **1. Examination.**

Begin by sitting quietly and paying attention to your mind and body. Consider these reflection questions: Are you angry? Tense? Bitter? Ashamed? Frustrated? Scared?

Ask God to open your mind and heart so that you might see anything that's offensive to Him within you. Allow the feelings and emotions that come to the surface to inform you about the status of your own heart. Instead of pushing them aside, press into these questions and ask yourself why.

Why are you angry? Why are you tense? Why are you ashamed? And so on. See if any of your answers can be traced back to any more basic human impulses: are you seeking approval and failing to find it? Are you comparing yourself to others or some standard of perfectionism you hold?

It is often helpful to recount recent events. Think back throughout your day, then previous weeks and even months. Consider these reflection questions as you are thinking about the present and the past: What are your regrets? What do you wish you'd done differently? When did your emotions get away from you and why?

## 2. Confession.

As you search your heart and God begins to bring things to your mind, confess your sins. Be specific.

In his book *Recapturing the Wonder*, Mike Cosper offers these words as a helpful template: "Lord in your mercy, hear my prayer. Forgive me for \_\_\_\_\_. Let me trust in Jesus' blood for forgiveness, and let me now walk by the light of the Holy Spirit." Consider using these words or simply utilize your own.

Ultimately, confession is about honesty and trust before our merciful God. What you say to Him in confession does not always have to be sins of commission, but rather can simply be honesty and authenticity about telling God about your emotions and trusting that He cares enough for you to listen (1 Peter 5:7). Consider using these phrases:

"God, I am scared about \_\_\_\_\_."

"God, I am anxious about \_\_\_\_\_."

"God, I am angry about \_\_\_\_\_."

## 3. Assurance

The Practice of Examen always ends by remembering that the work of grace has already been accomplished by Jesus through His death and resurrection. Here, we must do what D. Martin Lloyd Jones has taught us — we must preach the Gospel to ourselves.

Think about this: who is the most influential person in your life? It's the person who talks to you more than anyone else and guess who that is?

You!

You are the most influential person in your life because you talk to yourself more than anyone else. Dr. Jones said that ultimately the aim of Scripture is to teach yourself how to talk to yourself the right way. And sometimes you have to tell your emotions what reality is and how they should feel. Because regardless of what we have going on in our soul or situation, we don't feel our way into our beliefs. Instead, we believe our way into our feelings. So consider these Scriptures to use in preaching the Gospel to yourself:

*"As far as the East is from the West, so far does He remove our transgressions from us." (Psalm 103:12)*

*"I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins. (Isaiah 43:25)*

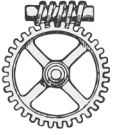
*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:6)*

Again, as we reflect on these Scriptures and remember God's mercy, it is crucial that we look to Jesus' reconciling work on the cross as the way that God has accomplished it. For many Christians, what they feel is the most reliable indicator of what is true. You may indeed feel like God has forgotten you. You may indeed feel distant from God. You may feel all of these things but God's Word tells us that your emotions are often not reliable indicators of reality so we must choose to believe God's Word even though we may not be able to feel His presence.

Martin Luther used to call this, "Drowning out the voices of despair with the louder voice of the Gospel." At times Luther would actually shout at the devil. He would go to a secluded place and yell, "No! I'm not been abandoned and I've not been forsaken by God because I know who He is and I know what He has done."

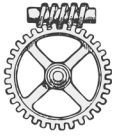
Maybe some of you should do that as you work through this practice of the Examen. It worked for me in the swamps of Florida. It worked for Luther in the forests of Germany. Perhaps, God will use it to work in your life in the hills of Texas too!





**March 6**  
**Judges 3:7-31**

**Sermon Notes**



# March 6

Judges 3:7-31

## Session Big Idea

God uses people who might seem unconventional to outsiders to save his people in order to draw their selfish hearts toward him.

## Read Judges 3:15-31

Why do you think Ehud's attack came as a surprise to Eglon? In what ways does Ehud's attack seem unconventional?

## Read Judges 3:7-11

How does this story show the stages of the cycle of the judges?

How do God's methods contradict the world's standards of strength and ability? In what ways have we fallen into the trap of seeing God's ways through the eyes of the world?

What does this cycle and Othniel's story teach us about God's character? What does God give to Othniel in verse 10 to help him conquer the Mesopotamians?

When have God's ways seemed confusing to you? What did you learn through that situation? What does it look like to see your circumstances from God's perspective?

## Read Judges 3:12-14

What changes between verse 11 and 12? What would lead Israel to fall away from God again?

## Faith at Home

Select an activity below to complete before next week.

**Hammer:** Ask God to show you the areas of your life that aren't completely devoted to him this week. Pray that God would lead you to repentance.

**Hospitality:** Talk with a Christian friend this week about what it means to compromise your beliefs for the things of the world. Discuss if that's been happening in your life and pray for each other.

**Explore and Experiment:** Consider the description and suggestion for the spiritual discipline of the silence and solitude on the next page. Grace is opposed to earning, not effort. Give this spiritual discipline a try this week and see what God will do through it in your life.

What effect have you seen selfishness have on your relationship with God? How does it impact the way you relate to him?

## Reading Plan

### Judges 3:7-31

Day One: 3:7-11

Day Two: 3:12-31

Why would God empower the Moabites against Israel? What about God's actions show that he is both faithful and just? In what ways have you experienced God's discipline? How did you mature from that experience?

## - RELINQUISH FALSE IDOLS -

# DISCIPLINE OF SOLITUDE

T.S. Elliot asked, “Where shall the world be found, where will the word resound? Not here, there is not enough silence.” Silence and solitude is a difficult discipline to practice because we are conditioned to be comforted by noise. Yet, the fruit of engaging in silence and solitude that we are able to intentionally think about ourselves and our God. This is the discipline that often opens the door to knowing God in ways that we previously thought were non-existent.

### **Definition of Practicing Solitude**

The practice of solitude involves scheduling enough uninterrupted time in a distraction-free environment that you experience isolation and are alone with God. Solitude is a “container discipline” for the practice of other spiritual disciplines.

### **Purpose of Practicing Solitude**

To leave people behind and enter into time alone with God.

### **Practicing Solitude Could Include...**

- Spending fifteen minutes or more alone with God. You can do an activity if you wish: walk, run, drive, iron. Dedicate the time ahead of you to God. After the time is up, consider how it was for you to be alone with God. Was it hard? Good? Did God speak to you in any way?
- Making the time you spend in the shower each morning your alone time with God. Present yourself to your Creator—all of your body, all of the dirt that has accumulated in your soul, all that God has made you to be. Let the water from the shower remind you of the water of life that nourishes and changes you. Let the warmth touch you with love. If you like a cold shower, let the bracing impact call you to live your life to the full. Offer yourself to God for the day. Thank him for the alone time he spends with you.
- Setting aside half a day for time alone with God. Go to the woods, quiet chapel or park. Don't stay in your home. Take only your Bible.

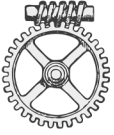
### **The God-Given Fruit of Practicing Solitude Is...**

- Freedom from the need to be occupied and stimulated.
- Moving away from letting the world “squeeze you into its mold” (Romans 12:2)
- Liberation from constantly living your life in reference to other people.
- Quieting the internal noise so you can better listen to God.
- Giving yourself time and space to internalize what you already know.
- Speaking only what you hear from God rather than out of your own opinions.
- Including solitude and retreat as part of your lifestyle.<sup>3</sup>

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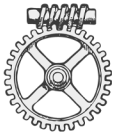
<sup>3</sup> Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us (Transforming Resources)* (pp. 113-114). InterVarsity Press.





**March 13**  
**Judges 4:1-5:31**

**Sermon Notes**



# March 13

## Judges 4:1-5:31

Personal and Small Group Guide

### Session Big Idea

God is able to use the selfish decisions of humans in order to bring about his glory and save his people.

### Read Judges 4:1-16

How does our church tradition typically view women and their gifts? How have you used your gifts in the local church? What impact does it make on your relationship with God when you're able to use your gifts?

What do Deborah and Barak do after Deborah conveys the final message? In what ways does God prove to be faithful to his promise in this passage?

### Read Judges 4:17-24

Does this passage say anything about Jael's motives to kill Sisera? What does it say about God that he is able to use the actions of people for his purposes, regardless of their motivation?

What does the fulfillment of Deborah's prophecy show about God's character? In what kind of situations has it been easy for you to question God's character?

What experiences have shown you God's faithfulness, trustworthiness, and sovereignty? What passages of Scripture have reminded you of these truths?

### Read Judges 5:31

This verse reminds us that God is the God of justice. What's different in your walk with God when you remember God's character in the face of evil? What hope does his justice offer you when you see evil in the world?

What characteristics of God do you need to remind yourself of this week? What could it look like to bring those characteristics to the forefront of your mind?

### Faith at Home

Select an activity below to complete before next week.

**Hammer:** Create a playlist, buy a new album, or download some praise songs to listen to throughout the week. Practice praising God throughout the day by listening to and singing along with the worship songs.

**Home:** Pray for someone in your family to increase their trust in God this week. Ask God to show them the areas of their life where they aren't trusting him and surrender those areas to him.

**Explore and Experiment:** Consider the description and suggestion for the spiritual discipline of unity on the next page. Grace is opposed to earning, not effort Give this spiritual discipline a try this week and see what God will do through it in your life.

### Reading Plan

#### Judges 4:1-5:31

Day One: 4:1-10

Day Two: 4:11-24

Day Three: 5:1-11

Day Four: 5:12-23

Day Five: 5:24-31

## - SHARE MY LIFE WITH OTHERS -

# DISCIPLINE OF UNITY

John 17 contains the last recorded prayer that Jesus prayed on the night before he died. First he prays for himself and then his disciples. Then he does something that may surprise you: “I pray also for those who will believe in me...that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” (John 17:20–23)

The last prayer that Jesus prayed before he died included a plea for unity with God and unity with each other. Unity is hard, though. Unity can be messy. That’s why unity is a spiritual discipline. It is an intentional choice that we make in response to the Gospel for the sake of the Gospel.

### **Definition of Practicing Unity**

Unity is the mark that demonstrates to the world that the body of Christ is one organism, with one faith, one hope, one baptism and one God and Father of all. Unity lives out the reality that Christ has already reconciled all things to himself. So in him we belong to one another.

### **Purpose of Practicing Unity**

To live in harmony with Christ’s desire for the church to be one; to be a bridge-builder and peacemaker in the body of Christ

### **Practicing Unity Could Include...**

- Studying the “one anothers” found in Scripture. Begin living out one of the “one anothers” this week. The following week choose another “one another.” Which “one another” is most difficult for you? Explain.
- Rejoicing or weeping with someone. The body of Christ is to “rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn” (Romans 12:15). Look back over the past year. Who has rejoiced with you? Who has wept with you? Talk to God about what this meant to you. What is it like for you to rejoice or weep with another?
- Looking for God in other churches: Once a year, visit another church tradition that is different from your own. How does this body of Christ reflect the Lord? What do they have to give you as part of the body?
- As much as it depends on you, make peace with a fellow believer you are separated from.
- Studying Jesus’ prayer in John 17. How does his prayer challenge your thoughts about unity?

### **The God-Given Fruit of Practicing Unity Is...**

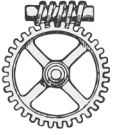
- Having fewer divisions between and more love among Christians.
- Focusing on the essentials, being gracious in the nonessentials.
- Growing in appreciation for the diversity of the body of Christ
- Living by Jesus’ prayer for the church in John 17.
- Continually praying for peace and unity within the church. <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us (Transforming Resources)* (p. 155). InterVarsity Press.

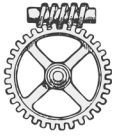






**March 20**  
**Judges 6:1-40**

**Sermon Notes**



# March 20

## Judges 6:1-40

Personal and Small Group Guide

### Session Big Idea

Though God's people choose the roundabout way of obedience, God is faithful to his word to bring about their deliverance

### Read Judges 6:1-10

Throughout Judges and in this story especially, God is clear about his conviction of sin and call to action. In what kinds of situations have you experienced God directly deal with you—maybe by convicting you or sin or calling you to do something? How did you respond?

God's faithfulness outshines Israel's sin. He continues to rescue them even though they don't completely turn back to him first. In what situations has God shown his faithfulness to you?

### Read Judges 6:11-35

The angel calls Gideon a man of valor, a courageous warrior but he's hiding from his enemies. His actions don't match God's description. What does it say about God that he'd call Gideon by a name that didn't match his actions?

When has God asked you to do something you felt ill-equipped to do? How did that situation play out? Did you obey? If so, how did God equip you to follow through in obedience? If not, what did that situation teach you about God and yourself?

What effect can fear have on your relationship with God? What does it mean to follow God even when you're fearful? When have you had to do that in your life?

### Read Judges 6:36-40

Looking back on the first 35 verses of chapter 6, what are all the ways God has confirmed Gideon's call to lead Israel to defeat Midian?

What has God done to show his patience with Gideon? Why do you think he's been patient with Gideon? What are some of the questions you've brought to God? What difference does it make to your relationship with God to know that he's patient with you, even in your questions, doubts, and hesitations?

### Faith at Home

Select an activity below to complete before next week.

**Hammer:** Take 10 minutes to bring your questions, doubts, and hesitations to God. Ask him to show one step of obedience you could take this week.

**Hospitality:** Choose one thing you feel like God has been asking you to do and do it this week—maybe it's writing a thank you note to your boss, praying for the checkout lady at the store, or giving money to a friend in need.

**Explore and Experiment:** Consider the description and suggestion for the spiritual discipline of meditation on the next page. Grace is opposed to earning, not effort. Give this spiritual discipline a try this week and see what God will do through it in your life.

### Reading Plan

#### Judges 6:1-40

Day One: 6:1-10

Day Two: 6:11-35

Day Three: 6:36-40

- HEAR GOD'S WORD -

## DISCIPLINE OF BIBLICAL MEDITATION

Shortly before he was executed by the Nazi's for his role in the plot to overthrow Hitler, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote these words in the spiritual classic, *Life Together*. When posing the question of why he meditates, he had this to say: "Why do I meditate? Because I am a Christian. Therefore, every day in which I do not penetrate more deeply into the knowledge of God's Word in Holy Scripture is a lost day for me. I can only move forward with certainty upon the firm ground of the Word of God."

For Bonhoeffer, meditation on Scripture was not an optional piece of Christian spirituality; it was vital. In fact, at the underground seminary he began at Finkenwalde, students were required to begin the day with a half hour of meditation. Is it possible that Bonhoeffer's practice of deep meditation allowed him the courage to move forward with certainty to stand up to the Nazi regime? Maybe his words from *Life Together* were eerily prophetic and it was the firm ground of the Word of God that gave him the courage to be faithful even to the end.

Consider taking a lesson from Bonhoeffer and consider the following methods for biblical meditation. Most of these are adapted from Donald Whitney's excellent book, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. Other methods are from faithful Christians throughout the ages. The goal of utilizing these methods is not to overwhelm yourself with all of them but rather to try a few out and see which one's resonate best with you. Think of the Bible as an infinitely deep well and these methods are simply different types of buckets to help you draw water. Depending on your strength, season, and personality, some buckets may be more helpful than others.

### **Practice 1: Emphasize Different Words in the Text**

This method takes the verse or phrase of Scripture and turns it like a diamond to examine all perspectives. So a meditation on Jesus' words at the beginning of John 11:25 would look like this:

"**I** am the resurrection and the life."

"I **am** the resurrection and the life."

"I am **the** resurrection and the life."

"I am the **resurrection** and the life."

"I am the resurrection **and** the life."

"I am the resurrection and **the** life."

"I am the resurrection and the **life**."

Of course, the point is not simply to repeat vainly each word of the verse until they've all been emphasized. The purpose is to think deeply upon the light (truth) that flashes into your mind each time the diamond of Scripture is turned. It's simple, but effective.

### **Practice 2: Rewrite the Text in Your Own Words**

From his earliest schooling days, Jonathan Edwards' father taught him to do his thinking with pen in hand. This was a habit he practiced throughout his life. Meditating with pen in hand or fingers on the iPad can help you to focus your attention on the matter at hand, while stimulating your flow of thinking. With this method, imagine that you are sending the verse you've chosen in a message to someone. How would you convey the content of the verse faithfully, yet without using the words of that verse?

### **Practice 3: Think of an Illustration of the Text—What Picture Explains It?**

An illustration is a word picture that explains, clarifies, or confirms the object of your meditation. It can be a personal anecdote, an event in the news or in history, a quotation, an analogy, a song—anything that shines light upon the text. The first thing to do when you want to picture a passage is to consider whether there is a story in the Bible that illustrates the point of the verse upon which you are meditating, or, if you are meditating on a story, whether there is a single verse somewhere in Scripture that summarizes the point of that story.

Consider this example of this method from Thomas Watson as he described biblical meditation itself from the Deuteronomy 6:6. Pretty meta, but you get the point: *“Meditation is like the shining of the sun, it operates upon the affections, it warms the heart and makes it more holy.”*

### **Practice 4: Ask How the Text Points to the Law or the Gospel**

One way of thinking of the Bible is that it presents us with God’s Law and God’s Gospel. The Law (basically the Old Testament) consists of what our holy and just God requires of people for them to have the righteousness necessary to live with Him in heaven. The Gospel (basically the New Testament) is the good news of how our loving and merciful God has provided through Jesus the righteousness He requires in His Law. I’m using broad strokes here and yes, I know that hints of the Gospel are in the Old Testament. That’s why this method is so interesting though — it actually helps you see the Bible as a whole. With this meditation method, you look for how the text you are considering points to some aspect of the Law, the gospel, or both.

### **Practice 5: Ask How the Text Points to Something About Jesus**

This is similar to the previous method, but it focuses entirely on the person and work of Jesus Christ. So if you remember, after His resurrection, as Jesus was walking on the road to Emmaus with two believers, we’re told that “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). Essentially this approach to meditation attempts to do the same thing — it examines the text to see how it might point to something about who Jesus is or what He did.

### **Practice 6: Ask How the Text Speaks to Your Current Situation**

John Flavel said that *“the finger of God is clearly seen by us when we pursue meditation.”* Suppose the current issue in your life is financial. After you have completed your Bible reading, review what you’ve read and search for any texts that address or might apply to finances. Then consider what the text says. If the immediate concern in your life relates to your family, think about what those verses have something to say about relationships. If you are wrestling with a persistent question, go back over all you’ve read in the past few minutes and scan it for something the Holy Spirit might illumine in relation to the answer. You may be surprised by the Scriptures God uses to give you insight, understanding, or application regarding your issue or question.

### **Practice 7: Set and Discover a Minimum Number of Observations from the Text**

With this method you resolve that you will not stop meditating on your chosen text until you discover at least a certain number of insights. This method is from a legendary assignment in a seminary class originally taught at Dallas Theological Seminary by professor Howard Hendricks. He would tell his students to come back to the next class with at least 25 observations on Acts 1:8. Having done so, they would be required in the next class to return with 25 more observations on that verse. Finally, they were given the assignment to make as many observations as they could beyond the original fifty. Most were thinking they had almost exhausted Acts 1:8 by the first round. That is, until Hendricks told the class with, “Oh, by the way, the all-time record is over six hundred.”

Not every verse in the Bible will be as fertile as Acts 1:8. However, this method is founded upon the belief that an infinite and inexhaustible God has inspired every text in Scripture.

### **Practice 8: Memorize the Text**

Simply put, when you are memorizing a verse, you think about it. The mental repetition of the text required by memorization fosters reflection at the same time. Further, after you memorize a verse of Scripture, you can meditate on it during your commute, while on a walk, as you are preparing a meal, when you are falling asleep, or any other time you choose.

### **Practice 9: Create an Artistic Expression of the Text**

This approach to the text consists of giving tangible expression to your meditations with a sketch or some other material manifestation of your thoughts. You could compose a song or poem based on the text. As Psalm 96:1 urges us, “Oh sing to the LORD a new song.” It doesn’t have to be intricate or lengthy, or even more than one note. Most often it might be entirely spontaneous. You could even take a cue from Martin Luther and adapt the tune of a popular song as he did with *A Mighty Fortress*. Straight up, Seeds Family Worship does a great job of this with their catchy tunes. Highly recommend.

### **Practice 10: Pray through the Text**

In *Knowing God*, J.I. Packer asked the question, “How can we turn our knowledge about God into knowledge of God? The rule for doing this is simple but demanding. It is that we turn each Truth that we learn about God into matter for meditation before God, leading to prayer and praise to God.”

Christian meditation is more than just riveted human concentration or creative mental energy. Praying your way through a verse of Scripture submits the mind to the Holy Spirit’s illumination of the text and intensifies your spiritual perception.

The Bible was written under the Holy Spirit’s inspiration; pray for His illumination in your meditation. True biblical meditation must always involve two parties—the Christian and the Holy Spirit. Praying over a text is the Christian’s invitation for the Holy Spirit to hold His divine light over the words of Scripture to show what you cannot see without Him.

### **Practice 11: Look for Applications in the Text**

The outcome of meditation should be application. Like chewing without swallowing, so meditation is incomplete without some type of application. As Maurice Roberts said, “*Unhurried meditation on gospel truths and the exposing of our minds to these truths is what yields the fruit of sanctified character.*”

So ask yourself, “How am I to respond to this text? What would God have me to do as a result of my encounter with this part of His Word? Is there something to start, to stop, to confess, to pray about, to believe, to say to someone?”

### **Practice 12: Ask the Philippians 4:8 Question of the Text**

Philippians 4:8: says “*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*” Donald Whitney observes that this verse can provide guidance for meditating on any verse of Scripture, as well as for meditating on “life.” Consider this series of questions based upon “these things.”

- What is true about this, or what truth does it exemplify?
- What is honorable about this?
- What is just or right about this?
- What is pure about this, or how does it exemplify purity?
- What is lovely about this? What is commendable about this?
- What is excellent about this (that is, excels others of this kind)?
- What is praiseworthy about this?

So whether meditating on a verse or story in the Bible, or on something in your life—circumstances, an event, an experience, an encounter with someone, the Philippians 4:8 questions can be a helpful guide.

### **Practice 13: Apply the Ignatian Prayer to the Text**

Ignatius of Loyola was a 16th century priest who founded the Jesuit Order within the Catholic Church. He taught his followers to meditate on the Gospels with an active imagination. For example, if you are reading the story of Jesus healing a paralytic in Mark 2, hear it as if you were the paralytic or as if you were a bystander. Feel the heat of the sun, the weariness of a journey on a long road, the shame of exposure, the judgment and condemnation from the religious leaders.

Now imagine Jesus.

What might He sound like? Does He touch you as He passes? Does He look you in the eyes? What do you hear? What do you feel?

Scripture is living and active. It is meant to take root and grow in our mind. Instead of just knowing what the story says, know how it feels and explore what the characters in the story must have experienced when they encountered Jesus.

To do this practice, go somewhere where you can avoid interruption.

Set a timer on your phone. A timer frees you from worries about length. Put your phone on do not disturb, and put the timer out of view. When the alarm rings, you have finished. As you initially try this practice, start small—just a few minutes. However, as you get more comfortable with it, add a few minutes at a time. Practices like this should be structured with a routine that your mind and body learn and can easily step into.

Begin by taking a moment to calm down your mind and body. Sit in a chair or kneel on the floor, and open your Bible. Take a short passage from one of the Gospels, such as any of the stories in Matthew 8. Read the passage a few times and allow your imagination to start filling in the details: the scenery, the weather, the sounds in the background, or the smell of the sea. Imagine the nervous expression on the face of the centurion. After a few readings, let your mind wander into that world. Focus on senses: sight, smell, sound, touch, taste.

When the timer goes off, take another moment to pray and reflect. What struck you? What part of the story might be worth coming back to later in the day?

This is a practice that gets richer with repetition. You are training your mind to imagine, and in doing so, you're liberating yourself from the need for spectacle and external stimulation.

### **Practice 14: Use “Palms Up, Palms Down” with the Text**

The practice of “centering down” has been used by Quakers to meditate for centuries. It is a time to become still, to enter into the silence, and to allow the fragmentation of our minds to become centered. There is a physical element to the practice as well called: *Palms Up, Palms Down*.

#### **Palms Down**

Begin by placing your palms down as a symbolic indication of your desire to turn over any concerns you may have to God. Be honest about your guilt, frustrations, struggles and anxieties. Examples of inward pray could be something like the following:

“Lord, I give to you my anger against \_\_\_\_\_.”

“I release my fear of \_\_\_\_\_ today.”

“I surrender my anxiety over not having enough money to pay for \_\_\_\_\_.”

“I am frustrated about not being able to \_\_\_\_\_.”

“I am guilty because I \_\_\_\_\_.”

Whatever it is that weighs on your mind or is a concern for you, just say, “Palms down.” Release it.

### **Palms Up**

After several moments of surrender, turn your palms up as a symbol of your desire to receive from the Lord. Meditate on what God has promised in His Word.

*“Lord, you say in your Word that you are love. I would like to receive your divine love for \_\_\_\_\_.”*

*“You say in your Word that whenever I am afraid, I should trust in you. Please help me to trust in you instead of giving into fear.”*

*“You say in your Word that because of Jesus’ work on the cross, you have cast my sins as far as the East is from the West. Please allow me to feel freedom from my guilt.”*

*“You say in your Word to cast my anxieties on you because you care for me. I would like to experience your care for me.”*

After centering down, spend some time in silence. Allow God to commune with you.

### **Practice 15: Use Breath Prayers to Re-Orient around the Text**

Breath prayers are exactly what they sound like: prayers that can be said in a single breath. To practice this discipline, you simply take in a deep, calming breath and, while exhaling, pray quietly or aloud a simple phrase meant to reorient you to God’s presence and His kingdom. This is a practice that brings the whole person back to an awareness of God.

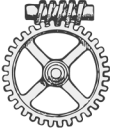
You might take a favorite verse of Scripture and adapt it. For example, Matthew 11:28 can become, “Lord I am weary, give me rest.” Romans 8:1 can be prayed as a reminder that “there is no condemnation.”

Still other ways to utilize breath prayers are through songs or hymns. The line “Let me hide myself in thee” from Augustus Toplady’s classic hymn, “Rock of Ages”, is an effective way to re-orient your day around who you are in Christ. On the other hand, if you enjoy more contemporary music, the line “You turn graves into gardens, you turn bones into armies” from Elevation Worship’s appropriately titled, “Graves into Gardens” reminds us of God’s power in the world and in us. Really, the creative possibilities are endless because each phrase is like the tip of an iceberg: it reaches back into a deeper, richer story and roots us in a larger, God-filled world.

The beauty of this practice is in its portability. There is no place, no meeting, no encounter in life where one can’t stop and take a slow, deep breath. If you practice it regularly, you’ll find yourself whispering prayers without having to think too much about it and they will simply be part of life.

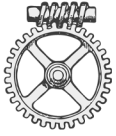






**March 27**  
**Judges 7:1-25**

**Sermon Notes**



# March 27

## Judges 7:1-25

Personal and Small Group Guide

### Session Big Idea

God leaves no room for human boasting by purposefully using the weak for his purposes.

### Read Judges 7:19-25

What about Israel's victory against the Midianites shows God's power? Do you think Israel would be able to boast in the victory? Why not?

### Read Judges 7:1-8

How does shrinking Israel's army from 32,000 to 300 cause them to depend on God?

What are some of the "big things" God has done in your life? What's tempting about taking the glory for your strengths, accomplishments, or abilities?

What does our culture say about strength and weakness? Which one is more desired? Why is it more desirable? What part of seeing weakness as an advantage and dependence as the objective is most difficult for you?

### Faith at Home

### Read Judges 7:9-18

God is gracious to Gideon because he knows he's still afraid. In what situations or circumstances have you tangibly sensed God's grace in your life? If you look back on your walk with God, what elements of your story show God's grace to you?

Select an activity below to complete before next week.

**Home:** Make it a goal to tell someone in your family each day something about God—how he's moved in your life that day, something you're thankful to him for, or what he's done for you in the past.

**Hammer:** Sit down with a trusted Christian friend this week and confess some ways you've boasted in yourself instead of God. Take time to pray for each other and praise God for how he's worked in your lives.

With the description in verse 12 in mind, does God's choice of 300 men make military sense? Even so, what does Gideon learn from visiting the camp?

**Explore and Experiment:** Consider the description and suggestion for the spiritual discipline of humility on the next page. Grace is opposed to earning, not effort. Give this spiritual discipline a try this week and see what God will do through it in your life.

What's unique about Gideon's choice of "weapons"?

### Reading Plan

#### Judges 7:1-25

Day One: 7:1-8

Day Two: 7:9-18

Day Three: 7:19-25

## - INCARNATE CHRIST'S LOVE -

# DISCIPLINE OF HUMILITY

Humility is hard. In a world full of political, economic, and social hierarchies, humility is hard. After all, who wants to be on the bottom of the heap, last in line or out of the loop? People scramble to have others realize how gifted, qualified, valuable and productive they are. They compete so they won't be overlooked and underutilized.

This is normal. It is a very human thing to want to be known, appreciated, and valued for our potential. Humility does not mean thinking demeaning and low thoughts about ourselves. It's not denying the truth of our achievements or thinking less of ourselves. Humility stems from an honest understanding of who we are as Christians. It is having someone besides yourself as the center of your attention. Followers of Jesus are chosen, loved, appreciated and important to the Creator of the universe. The Holy Spirit inhabits them. They are free to be who they are—no more and no less.

### **Definition of Practicing Humility**

Humility is not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less. Humble people let go of image management and self-promotion. They honor others by making the others' needs as real and important as their own.

### **Purpose of Practicing Humility**

To become like Jesus in his willingness to choose the hidden way of love rather than the way of power

### **Practicing Humility Could Include...**

- If you are quick to draw attention to your good works, begin to do some things anonymously.
- What things are sources of pride to you? What about these things makes you proud? How do humility and pride fit together as you think about these things? How do you think God is calling you to think about the things that bring you pride?
- In Matthew 11:29 Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart." What are the characteristics of a gentle and humble heart? How are you cultivating a gentle and humble heart?
- Assess your own image-management quotient: Spend a week intentionally listening to how you speak about yourself to others. Journal when you spin the truth to put yourself in a better light. When introduced to others, note what you say about yourself and what you want to come out about you. Journal how you respond to another's praise or blame. What would it mean to speak more simply and truthfully about yourself? Ask God to root you in his love and set you free to simply be who you are.

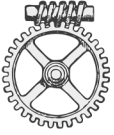
### **The God-Given Fruit of Practicing Humility Is...**

- Keeping company with Jesus so your identity rests with him alone.
- Having Jesus increase and you decrease.
- Being liberated from the need for others' approval.
- Taking your identity from being God's dearly loved child rather than from possessions.
- Being free from ostentation and pretense loving your neighbor as yourself.
- Taking as much interest in others as in yourself and your opinions.
- Living an authentically grateful life becoming like Jesus, "who made himself of no reputation."<sup>5</sup>

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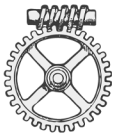
<sup>5</sup> Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us (Transforming Resources)* (p. 190). InterVarsity Press.





**April 3**  
**Judges 8:1-10:5**

**Sermon Notes**



# April 3

Judges 8:1-10:5

## Session Big Idea

Since sin is an internal problem that isn't solved by changing external circumstances, humans can't save themselves — they need a savior.

## Read Judges 8:1-21

What's different between how Gideon acted towards God before the battle and after? What do you think has changed in Gideon from when he hid in the winepress to what we just read in Judges 8:1-21?

What are some of your strengths? When have you experienced the temptation of taking pride in your strengths? What effect does it have on your relationship with God when you rely on your own strength?

## Read Judges 8:22-35

What does Gideon do to lead Israel away from God? What happens to the Israelites yet again after their judge dies?

The issue we keep running into with the Israelites is their unrepentant hearts. Nothing external—not even a judge chosen by God—can change their rebellious nature. In what circumstances is it tempting for you to believe that changing your external situation will transform your heart?

What has God done in your life to show you he's the only one powerful enough to transform your heart?

## Read Judges 9:1-6 and 9:50-10:5

What about Abimelech further proves that Israel has a problem? What could be the consequences of letting sin stay in our lives untouched? What happened when the Israelites didn't weed out their sin?

What does God do to judge Abimelech? In what ways is it similar to what happened to Sisera back in Judges 4:21?

In 10:1-5, Israel doesn't recognize the need for repentance anymore, but God decides to deliver them anyway. One of the challenges of following God is realizing our need for him in all situations—when we're weak, strong, or sinful. What has repentance looked like in your life?

## Faith at Home

Select an activity below to complete before next week.

**Hospitality:** Sit down with a trusted friend this week and confess sin together. Come up with one practical way you can each walk in repentance in the next week. Check in with each other to see how it goes.

**Hammer:** Pray that God would teach you to depend on him in your strengths and weaknesses this week. Each morning, take five minutes to pray about the day ahead and ask God to sustain you through it.

**Explore and Experiment:** Consider the description and suggestion for the spiritual discipline of labyrinth prayer on the next page. Grace is opposed to earning, not effort. Give this spiritual discipline a try this week and see what God will do through it in your life.

## Reading Plan

### Judges 8:1-10:5

Day One: 8:1-21

Day Two: 8:22-35

Day Three: 9:1-21

Day Four: 9:22-41

Day Five: 9:42-10:5

- PRAY YOUR LIFE -

## DISCIPLINE OF LABYRINTH PRAYER

Pilgrimages to holy sites have been a part of Christian tradition for millennia. Many still visit the Holy Land today. However, when a pilgrimage is not affordable or accessible, the discipline of pilgrimage can be honored through the symbolic prayer walk of the labyrinth. Labyrinths seem to have developed around the twelfth century as a substitute for making a pilgrimage to a holy site. Labyrinths are not mazes, nor are they something magical. Walking the labyrinth is not a dynamic technique to jump-start your spiritual life. It is a slow, quiet, meditative practice that has historically attended to the desire to make a journey toward God.

### **Definition of Practicing Labyrinth Prayer**

Labyrinth prayer is a contemplative spiritual discipline on a simple marked path that is based on the ancient practice of pilgrimage. On a pilgrimage, a pilgrim intentionally (1) leaves the world, journeying away from the noise and distractions of life, (2) eventually arrives and rests with Christ, and (3) returns home to live more deliberately and obediently as Christ's own.

### **Purpose of Practicing Labyrinth Prayer**

To make a quiet, listening pilgrimage to God

### **Practicing Labyrinth Prayer Could Include...**

- Labyrinths are often found at retreat centers or churches around Houston. Call a few retreat centers or churches and ask if they know where you can find a labyrinth. Set aside at least an hour to walk the labyrinth.
- To walk a labyrinth:
  - Intentionally leave behind all the noise and haste and clamor of your life. Prepare your heart to listen. God may bring a word of Scripture to your mind. Nature may speak of God's love and care. Be patient. Pay attention. How does the journey to the center reflect your current spiritual path?
  - As you walk intentionally toward God and the center of the labyrinth consider what you might need to surrender in order to live more fully in the love and fullness of his presence. Is there bitterness, addiction, expectation, pride, self-orientation, past hurts that you want to leave behind as you walk toward God? When you arrive at the center, offer these things to God. Leave them in the center with him.
  - Once in the center, abide in the presence of Christ. Ask for the grace you are seeking for your return to life in the world. Receive the comfort, inspiration or word the Spirit has for you. When you sense that it is time to leave, slowly and with a quiet mind make your way from the center back into the world, listening and stopping as you are prompted by the Spirit. How can you consciously live out of the word God has given you on your prayer walk?
  - When you receive a word from the Lord for your journey, hold on to it. It has been given specifically for you, specifically for now. Don't move away from this word too quickly. Return to it during the week.

### **The God-Given Fruit of Practicing Labyrinth Prayer Is...**

- Keeping company with Jesus in a prayer labyrinth.
- Slowing down and leaving behind the noise and busyness of life.
- Listening receptively intentionally seeking God and his guidance by bringing the concerns of your heart to him.
- Returning to the world with a deeper sense of God's power at work in you and your circumstances.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us (Transforming Resources)* (p. 235). InterVarsity Press.

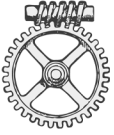






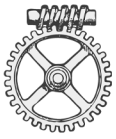
## PART TWO

We want to provide the context and resources to help every person at Faith Fellowship take their next step as followers of Jesus, even if their first step is their next step. Consider these guides that will walk you through the second half of book of Judges in personal as well as corporate study.



**April 24**  
**Judges 10:6-12:15**

**Sermon Notes**



**April 24**

**Judges 10:6-12:15**

Personal and Small Group Guide

### Session Big Idea

Sin corrupts how humans understand God and his character, which leads to devastating consequences.

### Read Judges 10:6-16

What does Israel do to show true repentance? What does it take for Israel to recognize their sin?

What has repentance looked like in your life? What changed about your heart? What about your actions?

### Read Judges 10:17-11:40

What about Jephthah is in keeping with the rest of the judges we've studied so far? What about Jephthah so far shows he might not have a clear understanding of God and his character?

Jephthah's problem is the same as Israel's – he isn't completely devoted to God and his ways. If he was, he'd know God hated human sacrifice and didn't ask for his people to make vows. What are some of the ways we misunderstand God as a result of the influence of our surrounding culture?

Jephthah's misunderstanding of God's character brings about tragic consequences. What are some modern examples of what could happen when we misunderstand God and his nature?

### Read Judges 12:1-7

What does it say about Israel that they've gone to war against themselves? How does it show that they've taken their disputes into their own hands instead of going to God?

What's different about the kind of "peace" Israel experiences in Jephthah's story versus the other stories in Judges? How has Israel's situation gotten worse?

### Faith at Home

Select an activity below to complete before next week.

**Hospitality:** Sit down with someone this week and talk about some of the ways we can sometimes misunderstand God's character. Remind each other of God's true nature and how we see it play out in Scripture and in our lives.

**Home:** Take five minutes this week to pray for a family member that they would consider their devotion to God. Pray God would teach them what it means to have a heart completely devoted to him.

**Explore and Experiment:** Consider the description and suggestion for the spiritual discipline of Sabbath on the next page. Grace is opposed to earning, not effort. Give this spiritual discipline a try this week and see what God will do through it in your life.

### Reading Plan

#### Judges 10:6-12:15

**Day One:** 10:6-18

**Day Two:** 11:1-11

**Day Three:** 11:12-28

**Day Four:** 11:29-40

**Day Five:** 12:1-15

- WORSHIP GOD -

## DISCIPLINE OF SABBATH

The fourth commandment reads: “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work” (Exodus 20:8-10). The Jewish understanding of sabbath embraced a special twenty-four hour rest time that was different from every other day. Other days of the week were given over to work, but the sabbath reminded people that they were finite. They could not constantly be on the go. There were limits to their energy. And to honor these limitations was to honor the infinite God, who himself worked and rested.

### **Definition of Practicing Sabbath**

Sabbath is God’s gift of repetitive and regular rest. It is given for our delight and communion with God. Time for being in the midst of a life of doing particularly characterizes the sabbath.

### **Purpose of Practicing Sabbath**

To set apart one day a week for rest and worship of God

### **Practicing Sabbath Could Include...**

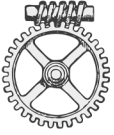
- Gather your family together to discuss how to arrange your sabbath for refreshment, renewal and relationships. Let everyone tell one thing they love to do on Sunday. Share what makes Sundays difficult for you. If getting to church is a hurried time that brings distress to the family, spend some time talking together about how to take the pressure off “getting out the door on time.” Would the family enjoy having Dad fix breakfast? Would they rather just drink juice and share a family brunch? What can be done the night before to make it easier to get going in the morning? How can you approach sabbaths in ways that do not force, rush or demand?
- The night before the sabbath day, enter into sleep as a spiritual act of worship. Consciously let go of your compulsion to be indispensable. Relax in God and rest.
- Plan a twenty-four-hour sabbath you can enter with anticipation. The night before your sabbath, remind your body how long it has to rest in God. Consider the things that would nourish you: worship, music, a nap, walking, reading, playing with children, afternoon tea. Plan them spaciouly into the day.

### **The God-Given Fruit of Practicing Sabbath Is...**

- Keeping company with Jesus through the Sabbath.
- Freedom from the addiction to busyness, rush and hurry.
- Acknowledging your human limits and living within them.
- Honoring the way God created you by living a healthy and intentionally rested life.
- Living a weekly rhythm of rest followed by six days of work
- Delighting in God, family, the seasons, meals and all good gifts of creation
- Trusting God for all that you’re not doing and taking care of on Sunday.<sup>7</sup>

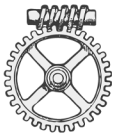
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<sup>7</sup> Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us (Transforming Resources)* (p. 40). InterVarsity Press.



**May 1**  
**Judges 13:1-25**

**Sermon Notes**



# May 1

## Judges 13:1-25

## Personal and Small Group Guide

### Session Big Idea

Even though his people do not realize their need for salvation, God will miraculously raise up a savior anyways

### Read Judges 13:1-5

What key component is missing from the cycle of judges? Why do you think God continues to be gracious to Israel? What's one tangible way God has shown his grace to you as you've followed him?

What are the significant details surrounding Samson's birth we learn from these verses?

### Read Judges 13:6-14

What do you think Manoah's prayer shows about how he views God? Why would God not provide Manoah an answer? What's the more important point that Manoah seems to be missing?

Learn more about the Nazirite vow in the Numbers 6:1-21. What are the key components of the Nazirite vow? What do all the rituals surrounding the Nazirite vow tell you about the seriousness of the vow? What would you expect from someone who took the Nazirite vow? Would he or she be flippant about it? Why or why not?

### Read Judges 13:15-25

It hits Manoah that he's seen an angel of God. He starts to panic, but his wife reassures him. What about her response in verse 23 reflects faith in God and understanding of his character?

In what ways is God's grace on display throughout the story of Samson's birth? In what circumstances is it easiest to forget God's grace towards you? Why do you think that is?

### Faith at Home

Select an activity below to complete before next week.

**Hammer:** Pray God would continue to remind you of his grace throughout the next week. Take a moment each day to thank him for the grace he's given you.

**Home:** Find a worship song or two that talks about God's grace to us. Sing or listen to those songs throughout the week as a reminder of God's grace. Share it with a family member too.

**Explore and Experiment:** Consider the description and suggestion for the spiritual discipline of teachability on the next page. Grace is opposed to earning, not effort. Give this spiritual discipline a try this week and see what God will do through it in your life.

### Reading Plan

#### Judges 13:1-25

Day One: 13:1-5

Day Two: 13:6-14

Day Three: 13:15-25

## - OPEN YOURSELF UP TO GOD -

# DISCIPLINE OF TEACHABILITY

The fourth commandment reads: “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work” (Exodus 20:8-10). The Jewish understanding of sabbath embraced a special twenty-four hour rest time that was different from every other day. Other days of the week were given over to work, but the sabbath reminded people that they were finite. They could not constantly be on the go. There were limits to their energy. And to honor these limitations was to honor the infinite God, who himself worked and rested.

### **Definition of Practicing Teachability**

Teachability is a propensity and openness to learn from God no matter who the teacher or what the experience may be.

### **Purpose of Practicing Teachability**

To remain a lifelong learner who is continually open to the fresh wind of the Holy Spirit

### **Practicing Teachability Could Include...**

- Studying some of the paradoxes of Scripture. Or study some of the hard sayings of Jesus. For instance: “He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.” (Matthew 12:30) “For whoever is not against us is for us.” (Mark 9:40) How do you live with the paradoxes of faith? What do you do when you can't fully explain something? Are you comfortable with mystery? Are you comfortable saying, “I don't know”?
- When have you learned something from someone who wasn't an authority or an expert? What did you learn? Write your “teacher” and express your appreciation.
- Becoming aware of your compulsions to let others know what you think. Notice when you're composing what you will say next rather than listening to the one who is speaking. Ask God to give you a teachable heart and a will to listen.
- Ask some of the people who know you best how you come across. Are you open and teachable? Do you tend to instruct people or set them right? How do people feel about disagreeing with you?

### **The God-Given Fruit of Practicing Teachability Is...**

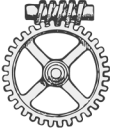
- Being a more perceptive listener, a more eager learner.
- Developing humility becoming aware of hardness of heart and unwillingness to love and grow.
- Realizing you don't know it all and that you don't have everything right.
- The ability to say, “I'm sorry. I messed up.” “Can you help me?” “What do you think?” “That's helpful to me.”
- Being a lifelong learner.
- Freedom from attachment to your opinions, your words, your authority; attachment to Jesus and his love and care for others.
- Freedom to resist being the teacher in social settings. <sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us (Transforming Resources)* (p. 82). InterVarsity Press.

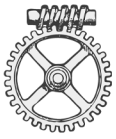






**May 8**  
Judges 14-16

Sermon Notes



**May 8**  
Judges 14-16

Personal and Small Group Guide

### Session Big Idea

Humans often think they can use God to get what they want, but God is not a means to an end.

### Read Judges 14:1-20

Samson disregarded God's law when he touched the carcass since he was under a Nazirite vow. When is it tempting to bend God's laws in order to get what we want? What are some ways we try to justify twisting God's laws for our own advantage?

Samson uses the power God gave him not to free Israel for her oppressors, but to settle a score. What does it show about Samson that he used his God-given gifts for his own reasons?

What are some the gifts, talents, or blessings God's put in your life? What happens when we use those gifts for selfish reasons?

### Read Judges 15:1-20

What's significant about Samson not acknowledging God for his victory over the Philistines? What does his exclusion of God reveal about his attitude towards God? What else does Samson do and say in this part of the story that displays his arrogance?

When has God done something miraculous in your life? Did you recognize that what happened was from him? Why or why not? When is it tempting to take credit for what God has done? What could be some ways to fight against that temptation?

### Read Judges 16:1-31

Samson takes for granted the gift God had given him by assuming it would always be with him. What kinds of gifts from God are easy to take for granted? What are some ways we can avoid taking God's gifts for granted?

How does Samson compare to the other judges we've studied? In what ways did he fall short of delivering Israel?

### Faith at Home

Select an activity below to complete before next week.

**Hammer:** Pray for God to shape the way you view him and his gifts this week. Any time you notice God's gifts, thank him for expressing his love to you.

**Hospitality:** Use your God-given gifts to serve someone in your life this week. Praise God for using you and your gifts for other people.

**Explore and Experiment:** Consider the description and suggestion for the spiritual discipline of submission on the next page. Grace is opposed to earning, not effort. Give this spiritual discipline a try this week and see what God will do through it in your life.

### Reading Plan

#### Judges 14-16

Day One: 14:1-20

Day Two: 15:1-20

Day Three: 16:1-22

Day Four: 16:23-31

## - RELINQUISH FALSE IDOLS -

# DISCIPLINE OF SUBMISSION

Submission is an unpopular concept these days. The notion of giving away power conjures up images of becoming a doormat, a weak-willed nonentity or a brainwashed cult follower. But this perception is miles away from the biblical model of submission. True biblical submission is not linked solely to hierarchy and roles. It begins in the very center of the Trinity where the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit all mutually honor and defer to each other. Christ's submission to the Father did not make him less than the Father. It was a way the Son gave glory to the Father. (Philippians 2:5-10 wonderfully depicts the nature of biblical submission.)

Godly submission is rooted in God's good and loving intentions for each one of us. Submission is not something God forces down our throats—because forcing people to submit is oppression. Therefore, biblical submission does not trap people in abusive relationships that rob them of their freedom. Submission is a way we allow God's kingdom agenda to shape our choices, relationships and vocations.

### **Definition of Practicing Submission**

Submission that leads to growth means aligning my will and freedom with God's will and freedom. God's will for us includes freely submitting to each other out of love and reverence for Christ.

### **Purpose of Practicing Submission**

To have Jesus as the King of my life in every way

### **Practicing Submission Could Include...**

- Arranging a coffee group discussion on the topic of submission. Ask people to share their positive or negative experiences of submission to each other. How does understanding these experiences inform your understanding of Ephesians 5:21—"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ"?
- Considering who today do you submit to in the normal events of your life: boss, teachers, parents, colleagues, friends, spouse? What does healthy submission look like in each of these relationships? Pray for grace in these relationships.
- Considering a character flaw you would like to have transformed in your life. What spiritual discipline might help you cooperate with God in his transforming work? Willingly practice this discipline for a stipulated period of time. Submit your process to a trusted friend. What is this like for you?

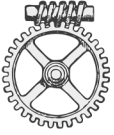
### **The God-Given Fruit of Practicing Submission Is...**

- Being free from the need to be in charge
- Teachability
- Esteeming and honoring others more than yourself
- Being free from a rebellious and autonomous spirit
- Surrendering and losing your life to find it
- Developing approachability, gentleness, humility
- Expressing a deep regard for others and what they might have to offer. <sup>9</sup>

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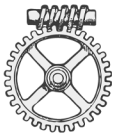
<sup>9</sup> Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us (Transforming Resources)* (p. 118). InterVarsity Press.





**May 15**  
**Judges 17-18**

**Sermon Notes**



**May 15**  
Judges 17-18

Personal and Small Group Guide

### Session Big Idea

If humans filter God through their cultural lens, they make God in their own image and think they're following God when they're actually dishonoring him.

### Read Judges 17:1-13

What have Micah and his mother done to redefine God? What are some of the ways our society redefines God into someone he's not?

What does Micah's decision to take a Levite as his personal priest tell us about his attitude toward God? In what kinds of situations is it tempting to think we can manipulate God to do our will?

### Read Judges 18:1-10

Again the author mentions that Israel had no king and the people do what is right in their eyes. God was supposed to be their king, but they abandon him and chase after what the world could offer them. What are some things in our lives that can tempt us to turn our backs on God?

### Read Judges 18:27-31

What does this final scene tell us about how the tribe of Dan viewed God? Did they truly honor and obey him? Why not?

What are some factors in your life—whether it be your past, the culture, relationships, or something else—that affect your view of God? Would you say those things have a positive or negative effect on the way you think of God? Why?

What about your view of God might need to change? What are characteristics of God that you feel you understand well?

### Faith at Home

Select an activity below to complete before next week.

**Hammer:** Take a few minutes to consider the ways you might be viewing God through a cultural lens. Think about what it might mean to view God as he is, and not as you'd like him to be.

**Home:** Pray for God to refresh a family member's view of him this week. Thank him for the ways he's revealed his character to you and to them.

**Explore and Experiment:** Consider the description and suggestion for the spiritual discipline of discipling on the next page. Grace is opposed to earning, not effort. Give this spiritual discipline a try this week and see what God will do through it in your life.

### Reading Plan

#### Judges 17-18

**Day One:** 17:1-13

**Day Two:** 18:1-10

**Day Three:** 18:11-31

## - SHARE YOUR LIFE WITH OTHERS -

# DISCIPLINE OF DISCIPLING

At Faith Fellowship, one of the primary ropes that ties our mission of reaching people with God's Gospel, building them as his Church, and sending his Church into the world is discipling. This is why we want to do everything we can to cultivate a culture of discipling in our church.

### What do we mean by “discipling”?

In one sense, almost everything we do as a local church is about being and making disciples. The songs we sing, the prayers we pray, and certainly the sermons that are preached all aim to grow us as God-glorifying disciples. But for this article we have something more specific in mind when we use the word “discipling.” We are thinking particularly about individual relationships. More formally, we are talking about the intentional encouragement and training of disciples of Jesus on the basis of deliberate, loving relationships.

Jesus tells us to pursue one another like this: “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you” (John 15:17). How did Jesus love his disciples in ways that could be imitated? He loved them intentionally, purposefully, humbly, joyfully and normally. Let's think about these descriptions.

- **Intentional:** “You did not choose me but I chose you...” (John 15:16a). Jesus did not merely stumble across his disciples; he took loving initiative. He chose them. Christ-like love is not passive; it takes initiative. Loving other Christians like Christ love us means taking the initiative.
- **Purposeful:** “...and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last” (John 15:16b). Christ's love for his disciples is purposeful. He called them to bear fruit for God's glory. In other words, his love is not merely sentimental, but has a wonderful, God-glorifying agenda. If we are to love one-another as Christ has loved us, surely we will share Jesus' goals for one another, namely, the spiritual good of our friend and God's glory through their joy in the gospel.
- **Humble:** Jesus says, “As the father has loved me, so have I loved you,” (John 15:9) and “Instead [of slaves], I have called you friends” (John 15:15a). Jesus condescends to be our friend, even though he is infinitely far above us in majesty, holiness, and honor. Surely, then, we must relate with all humility to our fellow fallen brothers and sisters. We treat them as friends whom we love, not as “projects” or “lessers.” We don't lord it over, we honor and cherish.
- **Joyful:** “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete” (John 15:11). Jesus commands us to love one another so that we would know his joy. Setting out to care for other Christians, encouraging their growth in grace, can be hard work. But it is wonderful work, and Jesus says it is joy-producing work!
- **Normal:** Jesus makes this kind of loving discipling his basic command to all his people and, thus, normal for all Christians. Listen again: “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.” Not surprisingly, you will find talk of basic Christian discipleship throughout God's Word: “But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness” (Heb. 3:13). “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves” (Rom. 12:10).

The New Testament is filled with such exhortations. Jesus and the apostles did not mean for discipling between Christians to be exceptional, but normal. As a member of our church, we want you to be intentional, purposeful, humble and joyful as we work together at making these kinds of one-on-one relationships normal. Do this by letting people get to know you. Do this by working to know them. Really, it is all of our work to cultivate a culture of discipleship in this place.

## **What do we mean by a “culture of discipling”?**

You will probably hear that phrase a lot around us. Most dictionaries define a “culture” as something like “the shared values, goals and practices that characterize a group.” That is pretty much what we have in mind when it comes to discipling at our church. We don’t want just a program, we want mutual love and encouragement to be a value, goal, and practice that increasingly characterizes all of us.

Formal programs are not necessarily bad, but we want to make sure we do not fall short of the biblical ideal. And the biblical ideal, we have said, is to become a place where it is normal to take initiative in doing one another spiritual good. You don’t have to sign up for anything or get permission before loving fellow members this way. Nor do you want a church where discipling only happens when the staff sustain it. That’s not a healthy church! No, we want you to pray and think about how you can jump in. And talk to an elder or some other member about your unique opportunities and stewardships.

## **What should I do in a discipling relationship?**

The most significant aspect of any discipling relationship, often, is not exactly what you do when you meet, but that you build a relationship with biblical truth at its core. As such, there is no “set program” for discipling relationships in our church. Members do a number of things:

- Meet weekly to discuss the prior Sunday’s sermon, a book, or a book of the Bible.
- Invite unmarried members to sit in on family devotions.
- Help dads with yard work and ask them for counsel.
- Get together for coffee and talk through accountability questions like John Wesley’s 21 Questions or Ed Stetzer’s 11 Questions.

## **How can I get into a discipling relationship?**

There are three ways to establish a discipling relationship at Faith Fellowship.

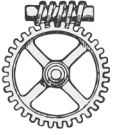
First, take the personal initiative to try to work out a discipling relationship with any other member (of your same gender, please). No staff permission needed! Over time we hope you will begin to build the kind of relationships where these things happen naturally.

Second, talk to your small group leader for suggestions and assistance.. They may not be free to meet up with you regularly, but as they get to know you, chances are they can help connect you with another member who would.

Third, if neither of these avenues results in a regular discipling relationship, feel free to contact one of the church staff for help. There are always a number of members who, because of schedules, geography, or other reasons, find it difficult to connect with another member one-on-one. In those cases the church staff is happy to help.

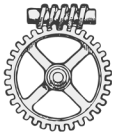
We do encourage you to start with your own initiative. It just might cause you to flex and even develop the discipline and evangelism muscles that will serve you and others for years to come. You might find that doing so becomes one of the most satisfying experiences of your life as a Christian. And you might find yourself understanding more clearly what Jesus meant when he said, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).





**May 22**  
**Judges 19-21**

**Sermon Notes**



**May 22**  
Judges 19-21

Personal and Small Group Guide

### Session Big Idea

When humans take life into their own hands, it leads to destruction, abuse, and despair, but with God in the picture, we're not without hope

### Read Judges 19:1-30

What do the events of Judges 19 show about Gibeah?

When God's people rebel against him, the weak are abused, which is definitely the case in the story of the Levite and his concubine. What are some other examples of weak people being abused by powerful people?

What might it look like to care for the abused in our society? What are some ways you or our church is involved in protecting vulnerable people?

### Read Judges 20:8-18

What's tragic about Benjamin's decision to stand with the men of Gibeah?

Israel's unfaithfulness has spiraled out of control—they're fighting against their own people. Sometimes blatant rebellion against God can cause disunity in God's people. Without turning to gossip, what things have you seen divide the people of God?

What are some ways you've witnessed God's people work actively towards unity?

### Read Judges 21:1-12 and 21:20-25

The Israelites cry out to God about Benjamin's demise, as if God was the one who made the disaster happen. What are some examples of ways we're tempted to blame God for things that are our fault?

What has changed about Israel's treatment of women throughout Judges? What's despairing about the end of the book of Judges?

What is one thing you've learned through studying Judges? What do you hope to remember from this study moving forward?

### Faith at Home

Select an activity below to complete before next week.

**Hammer:** Thank God for what he's taught you about himself throughout studying Judges. Pray he would continue to solidify the truths from Judges in you.

**Home:** Choose a worship song with lyrics that praise God for who he is. Play that song in your house or apartment a few times this week.

**Explore and Experiment:** Consider the description and suggestion for the spiritual discipline of care for the earth on the next page. Grace is opposed to earning, not effort. Give this spiritual discipline a try this week and see what God will do through it in your life.

### Reading Plan

#### Judges 19-21

**Day One:** 19:1-30

**Day Two:** 20:1-17

**Day Three:** 20:18-35

**Day Four:** 20:36-48

**Day Five:** 21:1-25

**- INCARNATE CHRIST'S LOVE -**

## **DISCIPLINE OF CARE FOR THE EARTH**

Scripture makes it clear that we are caretakers and stewards of all that God has made. In the Old Testament, God's people were to make sure the land and animals had a sabbath rest (Leviticus 25). Just because land could yield crops every year and animals could work every day did not mean that they should. God has asked us to respect the created order. For when we exploit this beautiful world we harm not just land and animals and air but ourselves as well. Environmental degradation increases the labor of those who already struggle to find water and collect natural resources. Economic productivity is never the last word when we are dealing with limited natural resources.

Creation is God's gift, and it is to be nurtured and maintained with love and care. Christians are to exercise loving dominion that honors scriptural values and leaves future generations what they will need.

### **Definition of Practicing Care for the Earth**

Caring for the earth is a way of expressing God's delight in his very good creation. By engaging in loving care of the earth, the environment, the plants and the animals, we honor the gifts and treasures of our Creator.

### **Purpose of Practicing Care for the Earth**

To honor the Creator by loving, nurturing and stewarding his creation

### **Practicing Care for the Earth Could Include...**

- Planning a way to make the earth more beautiful. Plant flowers in the inner city or around a school. Sponsor or take care of a stretch of road. Share your motivation with others.
- Plant a garden. Share the produce or plants with others.
- Teach a child how to garden. Take a child on a nature walk and point out environmental goods and ills.
- Become familiar with some part of our distressed environment. (Do a Web search on the environment and you will find dozens of ways to participate in good stewardship of the earth.)
- Commit yourself to stewardship of some earthly resource. Walk or ride a bike rather than drive your car. Recycle.
- Take a walk through God's beautiful world. What characteristics of God are revealed in earthly beauty? Journal your discoveries.
- Become conscious of the litter in the places you live and work. Organize an hour or morning when volunteers pick up litter.

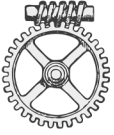
### **The God-Given Fruit of Practicing Care for the Earth Is...**

- Keeping company with Jesus no matter what this planet undergoes.
- Honoring the Creator and celebrating his handiwork.
- Contributing to the beauty of and mending the brokenness of this planet sharing God's earth—my yard, the harvest from my garden, my flowers, my private property—with others.
- Witnessing to Christ through wise stewardship of our ecological resources.
- Growing in the realization that all created things belong to God and not ultimately to humans.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us (Transforming Resources)* (p. 180). InterVarsity Press.





**May 29**

**Putting It All Together**

**Sermon Notes**

- PRAY GOD'S WORD -

## DISCIPLINE OF FIXED-HOUR PRAYER

Jesus learned to pray the traditional Hebrew way. In the morning he prayed the Shema: "Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4) as well as a series of blessings known as the tephilla. In the afternoon the tephilla was prayed again. Evening prayer was identical to morning prayer but included private petitions. Like David, who prayed seven times a day (Psalm 119:164), and Daniel, who prayed three times a day (Daniel 6:10), Jesus and the Jews of his day prayed at set hours of the day. It was a devout Jew's habit to go to the temple at the sixth and ninth hour (noon and three o'clock). After Jesus' death, his disciples continued to pray at fixed hours of the day (Acts 3:1; 10:3, 9, 30).

This custom of praying at set daily intervals quickly became part of the early church's rhythm of prayer. The Didache, an early manual of Christian practices, encouraged believers to pray the Lord's Prayer three times daily (Didache 8.3) Given this history, it is quite understandable how the early church fathers would develop patterns for praying Scripture at fixed hours that integrated rhythms of prayer and work.

Since all time belongs to God, why not punctuate the entire cycle of day and night with regular times for prayer, which could potentially shape both laity and clergy.

### **Definition of Practicing Fixed-Hour Prayer**

Fixed-hour prayers call for regular and consistent patterns of attending to God throughout the day.

### **Purpose of Practicing Fixed-Hour Prayer**

To honor the Creator by loving, nurturing and stewarding his creation

### **Practicing Fixed-Hour Prayer Could Include...**

- In addition to your normal time of prayer, establish one new time of prayer during the day. Set a timer or your computer to remind you to stop for one to fifteen minutes to pray. After one week, consider what this has been like for you.
- If you would like to pray the Liturgy of the Hours, try using *The Divine Hours* by Phyllis Tickle. These three volumes are guides to prayer for the entire year. Choose one time in the day to stop for five minutes and pray with a friend. Use a liturgy or pray spontaneously.
- When you wake in the middle of the night, don't fight with yourself about why you are awake. Lean deeply into God and simply pray for the things that come to mind. Don't hurry. Pray to God as David did "in the watches of the night."

### **The God-Given Fruit of Practicing Fixed-Hour Prayer Is...**

- Keeping company with Jesus throughout the hours of the day
- Turning the heart and mind to God at specific hours of the day and night.
- Growing detached from the all absorbing compulsiveness of work.
- Integrating being and doing in your daily life.
- Developing the ability to hear a word from God in the midst of daily activities.
- Joining the timeless prayer rhythms of the church throughout the ages. <sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us (Transforming Resources)* (p. 223). InterVarsity Press.

- EXPLORE AND EXPERIMENT -

## SPIRITUAL FORMATION INDEX

This Spiritual Formation Index is an invitation to allow God to search your thoughts and begin to recalibrate your heart. While a tool like this can never truly assess the interiority of your heart, it can give a glimpse of where you are at a particular moment in time because it reveals the progress of an organic, invisible process we call spiritual formation. These measurements don't force growth to happen; they reveal where you are and where you hope to be next time you get measured. Think of it like taking your blood pressure as a measure of your health. If you take the assessment in another six months, you may be able to see where the invisible process of formation is producing fruit in your life.

This is important to know: there is no one-size-fits-all program — only the invitation to recognize where God is at work and calling you into the deeper waters of faith. This spiritual formation index will not measure behavior or chart standards of excellence. It cannot assess your qualification for leadership, your talents or your ministry skills. It won't account for the fruit of the Spirit in your life, nor will it fix your heart. This assessment can, however, put you in touch with a desire for God that translates into fuel and fire for the spiritual journey.

This particular inventory, adapted from Adele Calhoun's excellent book *Handbook of Spiritual Disciplines*, is designed around the acronym WORSHIP. Each letter of the word *worship* represents a way that we can experience God and grow in our spiritual formation. The assessment on the following pages will help you take inventory of your own progress in spiritual formation and, hopefully, help you grow more deeply in your faith in and worship of God as we walk through Judges together.

**Complete the Spiritual Formation Index on the following pages and record your score totals.**

	<b>Score</b>
<b>W</b> orship God	
<b>O</b> pen Yourself Up To God	
<b>R</b> elinquish False Idols	
<b>S</b> hare Your Life	
<b>H</b> ear God's Word	
<b>I</b> ncarnate the Love of Christ	
<b>P</b> ray Your Life	

Look back over the Spiritual Formation Index and your life as a worshiper. They reveal areas of desire, neglect and need. Consider where you grew during this study in the book of Judges as you explored and experimented with spiritual disciplines. Which disciplines did you find most enjoyable? Least enjoyable? What did you learn?

## Worship God

Fill out the chart below using the following guide:

1 = not true

2 = needs improvement

3 = most of the time

4 = consistently true.

	1	2	3	4
I am aware of God's presence in my life, confident of his love for me and intentionally celebrate our connection.				
Worshiping with fellow believers gives me a deep sense of joy and God's presence.				
I take time to celebrate God and acknowledge my limits by deeply entering into a weekly sabbath day that is different from every other day.				
I am aware of where I place people, experiences and images before God.				
I am a joyful, thankful person who expresses gratitude to God and others easily and often.				

**Total Score:** \_\_\_\_\_

Take note of which desire most resonates with you and produces a longing to go deeper with God in this particular category.

### Questions for Consideration

- Am I celebrating the love and glory of God with reverence and joy?
- Where am I longing to move into deeper celebration of God?



## Open Yourself to God

Fill out the chart below using the following guide:

1 = not true

2 = needs improvement

3 = most of the time

4 = consistently true.

	1	2	3	4
I regularly and intentionally make space in my life for prayerfully listening to God at home, at work and with others.				
I can admit my mistakes, weaknesses and growing edges to God as well as others.				
I enjoy time spent alone with God in quiet reflection.				
I recognize and live freely within my limits. I pay attention to my feelings, my body, my losses and my needs.				
I don't need to be doing something for God or others in order to feel good about myself.				

**Total Score:** \_\_\_\_\_

Take note of which desire most resonates with you and produces a longing to go deeper with God in this particular category.

### Questions for Consideration

- How am I opening myself up to God in deeper ways?
- Where do I want to let go of defenses and busyness so I can become more open to God's activity in my life?

## Relinquish False Idols

Fill out the chart below using the following guide:

1 = not true

2 = needs improvement

3 = most of the time

4 = consistently true.

	1	2	3	4
I am aware of my sin and blind spots and how they hurt others. I easily apologize to others and seek to live out of my true self in Christ.				
I am able to leave the crowded, noisy world of acclaim and doing behind, retreating into silence and solitude with God and letting him restore me.				
I recognize the voice and activity of the Holy Spirit in my life.				
I recognize my addictions and compulsions, and am committed to living free of them.				
I take time to carefully discern when my plans and ambitions are legitimately for the glory of God and when they cross the line into my own desire for greatness or approval.				

**Total Score:** \_\_\_\_\_

Take note of which desire most resonates with you and produces a longing to go deeper with God in this particular category.

### Questions for Consideration

- How am I growing in self-awareness and becoming more authentic in my relationships?
- Where do I want to let go of secondary things so that I can be more authentic in my relationship with God and others?

## Sharing Your Life

Fill out the chart below using the following guide:

1 = not true

2 = needs improvement

3 = most of the time

4 = consistently true.

	1	2	3	4
I have a relationship with someone who helps me grow in my spiritual walk.				
I feel comfortable opening my home, my heart, my faith and my life to people not in my family.				
I am not judgmental toward others. I know how to make peace and deal with anger in constructive ways. I am not argumentative and contentious.				
Others describe me as honest, vulnerable, open and approachable.				
I am not hypersensitive and easily offended. I give and receive love freely and easily.				

**Total Score:** \_\_\_\_\_

Take note of which desire most resonates with you and produces a longing to go deeper with God in this particular category.

### Questions for Consideration

- Am I connecting with God and others in a caring, healthy community?
- How am I hoping that the people of my local church will contribute to my spiritual formation?

## Hearing God's Word

Fill out the chart below using the following guide:

1 = not true

2 = needs improvement

3 = most of the time

4 = consistently true.

	1	2	3	4
I am growing in biblical literacy and know how scriptural truth intersects with my life.				
On a regular basis I am nourished by spending time with God and his Word.				
The Bible is alive and interesting to me.				
I have a plan for reading Scripture.				
I regularly study, meditate, memorize, or listen to the Bible with other people (with a spouse, small group, accountability group, etc).				

**Total Score:** \_\_\_\_\_

Take note of which desire most resonates with you and produces a longing to go deeper with God in this particular category.

### Questions for Consideration

- Do I want to connect more deeply with God and His Word? How so?
- Am I cultivating the knowledge of God, the character of Christ and the presence of the Spirit in my life?

## Incarnate Christ's Love

Fill out the chart below using the following guide:

1 = not true

2 = needs improvement

3 = most of the time

4 = consistently true.

	1	2	3	4
I work for justice and have a heart for the dispossessed and needy that is visible to others.				
I am just and fair in dealing with others. I honor my contracts and commitments, even if they inconvenience me.				
I know my gifts and contribute them to the kingdom of God. I am more concerned about building God's kingdom than my own.				
The fruit of the Spirit is more and more evident in my life.				
People with problems, needs, sorrows and losses seek me out. They know I care.				

**Total Score:** \_\_\_\_\_

Take note of which desire most resonates with you and produces a longing to go deeper with God in this particular category.

### Questions for Consideration

- How am I giving myself and my resources away to God and others?
- Am I a good steward of my God-given gifts for the growth of Christ's kingdom?

## Pray Your Life

Fill out the chart below using the following guide:

1 = not true

2 = needs improvement

3 = most of the time

4 = consistently true.

	1	2	3	4
It's easy for me to get around to prayer.				
My prayer life is <b>not</b> mostly about myself and my needs.				
I am able to authentically pray my emotions, losses, anger, doubts and desires. I feel comfortable telling God all the 'good, bad and ugly' in me.				
I am comfortable praying out loud with others.				
I am aware of how God speaks to me, and I know how to listen to God and recognize his voice.				

**Total Score:** \_\_\_\_\_

Take note of which desire most resonates with you and produces a longing to go deeper with God in this particular category.

### Questions for Consideration

- Am I attending to God's activity in my life and listening to him on a regular basis?
- Where do I want to connect with God more deeply? What does this look like?

