# CONNECT GUIDE

# THE BOOK OF JUDGES

### WALLACE MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH

### AS WE BEGIN A READING PLAN

### WEEK 4

- Judges 6
- Joshua 7
- Joshua 8
- Joshua 6:33-40
- Luke 4

### WEEK 6

- Judges 6
- Judges 7
- Judges 8
- Ephesians 2
- Numbers 21:4-9,2 Kings 18:1-8, John 3:14-16

### WEEK 5

- Judges 6
- Joshua 7
- Joshua 8
- 1 Samuel 13
- John 6

## **WEEK FOUR**

### DAY 1: JUDGES 6

Chapter 6 begins a new section of our study. In Joshua we studied the patterns of sin and neglect that ultimately lead to the ongoing cycle in Judges. Then in the first two chapters of Judges we saw how each generation began the cycles anew by forgetting God and what He had done. Chapter 3 through 5 showed us how each cycle of oppression was eventually thwarted by a leader who trusted God and was willing to obey Him,

Each of these Judges that God sent to extract Israel from their captors in 3 through 5 seem to have the same thing in common: They were all willing to faithfully respond to the call of God and lead His people in the way He commanded. As we go forward in the book we begin to see leaders who are a bit more hesitant and complicated. We will also get a much more detailed description of their ever worsening failures.

When we first meet Gideon he's not exactly the picture of bravery. Judges 6 tells us that he was "in the winepress." We'll skip the explanation of ancient farming techniques, and just say that the winepress is a giant hole in the ground. Gideon is going to extreme lengths not to be seen. He is doing the same the rest of Israel is described as doing, and simply hiding from the Midianites so they won't take his food.

When the Angel of the Lord visits him with a mission from God, Gideon replies with a list of fears and excuses. It's here that Gideon is most like us. Yeah, I know that you probably want to think of yourself as someone like Ehud, Shamgar, or Deborah. Someone that valiantly follows God into battle, but the truth about us is that we're more like an anxious Gideon than a crafty Ehud 99 percent of the time. In our lives this is often the thing that loops us into cycles of sin and failure. We know what God has asked us to do, but we make the same excuses of fear and incapability. The Angel tries to help Gideon understand that victory here has nothing to do with Gideon, but everything to do with God.

So today as you read, take a step back from Old Testament history and ask yourself: What is it that I'm supposed to be doing that I'm not? How is my personal doubt keeping me from fulfilling what God has already decided? Gideon wanted a sign even though God was already clear. Don't make Gideon's mistake. Jesus already told us to go tell the world, so don't ask for a sign. Just go.

- How has God helped you overcome a fear in your life?
- Can you find a verse in the Bible where God has already declared victory?

### DAY 2: JUDGES 7

In a book where most of the stories are of sad and disturbing failures, Chapter 7 and the battle with Midian is a bit of a bright spot. It's not just a victory, it's a miracle. This chapter's best feature though, isn't the build up, the action, or the surprise twist that ends in victory. No, the best part of this chapter is that it teaches us something very important about how God does things.

From Tsun Tsu to General Colin Powell, every military leader ever has taught us that overwhelming force and superior numbers will always be the key to winning a battle. Gideon begins chapter 7 with an army of 32,000 which seems like a good number if you want to win. God however, wants to make sure that this battle isn't attributed to the power of an overwhelming force. The 32,000 becomes 10,000 which eventually comes down to 300. Now, regardless of what Hollywood wants you to believe about ancient Sparta, you can't defeat an army with 300 men. You can't, I can't, but God can.

This is where we learn our most important lesson. God cares way more about revealing Himself to us than He does about calming our fears, because it's only when we understand who God is that we can step past our fears. Yes, the tactic was brilliant, but it would have been useless if the Midianites had sent even a few scouts to figure it out. The victory happened

because God controls everything and He wanted the world to understand that.

Gideon's shining moment was when he trusted God and did something that seemed completely insane. God used Gideosn trust to reveal Himself through a miraculous victory. God then had the author of Judges record this in specific detail so that you and I could give Him glory and know more about Him. When people are obedient, God creates victory. Knowing Him is more valuable than any strategy, preparation, skill. So plan wisely, use your gifts and talents, but always value obedience to God over all of those, because that's what He wants from us.

- Why is it hard to trust God even though we know He is all powerful?
- How can you make the most of your talents, work hard, and still depend on God?

### **DAY 3: JUDGES 8**

I hope you enjoyed yesterday's moment of victory in obedience for Gideon and Israel... because that's about all the good that's going to happen from here on out. Chapter 8 might seem like a continuation of victory at first glance, after all, the enemy kings are captured and Israel is freed from their oppression, but with a closer look we see a difficult truth begin to arise. Their situation gets better, but this time they begin to forget God even in the middle of the victory He is granting them.

At Gideon's invitation, the men of Ephraim show up to take part in the battle and chase down the Midianite Kings. Do they greet Gideon with cheering and gratitude? Absolutely not. Their only concern is that they have been slighted. They hear that a great battle has been won and now they are offended. Why weren't they invited? They should have been asked to participate and instead of chasing down the enemy they're ready to fight Gideon over their bruised egos.

Now, there are several things that are clearly going wrong here. First, it's not like this was a new problem. The Midianites had been oppressing Israel for 7 years. Even if they were slow planners, they were the largest and most powerful tribe in terms of military power and economic stature, so 7 years was plenty of time to do something if they wanted to. Second, and most importantly, it seems that neither Gideon nor the men of Ephraim have even a moment to spare for God. The God

who won the battle, with a miracle, after he stacked the odds against His people to prove that it was His doing. In chapter 2 there was a generation who forgot about God's victories decades after they happened and all the leaders had passed. In chapter 8 the battle hasn't even finished and they have already pushed God to the side to focus on their own selfish pride.

It's right here that we need to examine ourselves and see if we've done the same. How many times has God delivered you? How many of your failures has Jesus erased with His sacrifice? Have many bad choices has the Holy Spirit saved you from by putting that overwhelming conviction in your gut before you did something stupid? Have you given Him the glory for this? Not just in your private prayer time, but in public testimony. So often we have a shorter memory than a goldfish. We beg God to miraculously save us, and then we go on with our day like we earned it or deserved it. Many of us have grown up with great privilege and achieved much success and stability in our lives, but do we thank God for that every time we think of it? In this moment we should stop, and analyze ourselves to make sure we don't forget God like Gideon and the Men of Ephriam. Today, spend some time pondering all you've been able to do in this life and give God the glory for every moment.

- Have you ever been intimidated like Gideon was by Ephraim?
- How can you honor God for all the victories in your life?

### **DAY 4: JUDGES 6:33-40**

Have you ever heard the old saying "I'm laying out a fleece?" Although it's not popular anymore it was once a very common phrase that was used to describe when someone was repeatedly testing God to see what He wanted. Over time, this phrase became a clever way of saying "I'm not sure if God wants this so I have to ask again," much like someone today would say "I'm not sure, I'm still praying about that." (Yeah, we know you'd love to help out in the nursery, but you're still praying about it.)

"Ok bro, we get it you love history and linguistics, but is there a reason you're taking us on this nerd journey?" Well yes. Our focus this week is on Judges Chapter 6, and the primary theme of this chapter is how Gideon keeps testing God and asking Him over and over to reiterate His command, and reassure Gideon that He still means it. It's actually chapter 6, verses 33-40 that gave birth to the phrase "I'm laying out a fleece." The sad part of this is that when people use that phrase they think they're sounding wise and spiritual, but they are just emulating the bad example of Gideon.

So we need to go back and point out something very important about how we read the Bible. God is the hero of the Bible. Jesus is the example. Humans are the bad examples, and the failures. Even Characters like Joshua or Enoch who are praised for their faithfulness are ultimately shown to not be enough to fix the problem of human sin. It's ok to follow the example of Gideon in the brief moments where he sets aside his worry to actually follow God, but the point is that human leaders aren't enough, because even the best person on this Earth is tragically flawed like you and me.

The other lesson might hurt a little. Let's stop cloaking our excuses in spiritual language. Let's stop saying we're "struggling with that sin," when in reality we just don't want to give it up. Let's stop saying "I'm still praying about that," as a delay tactic to put something off. Let's stop saying "everything happens for a reason," in a vain attempt to comfort someone when as the church we should actively be seeking to bear their burdens with them and lament the injustice of this world. No, Gideon wasn't being spiritual, or thorough, or wise when he asked for the sign of the fleece, and neither are we when we emulate him.

- Have you ever tried to sound spiritual while making an excuse?
- Has God ever given you a specific sign even though you were doubting?

### DAY 5: LUKE 6

Wait... we've been talking about Gideon all week and suddenly we're reading the temptation of Jesus? Is this another misprint? No, it's not, not this time at least. When we analyze the leaders in Judges, the primary thing we want to do is see their shortcomings and recognize how we need God to send us someone better. We need Him to send us Jesus, because He's the better leader in every way.

Luke 4 is actually one of the best places to prove that Jesus is in fact the better leader, because in that moment He proves that He won't fail and fall into the sin and evil that Israel embraced. Everywhere Israel fails, whether that be the wilderness, the promised land, or in exile, Jesus succeeds. Today we want to

see how He specifically proves that He is a better leader than Gideon.

Gideon refused to trust God in chapter 6. He wants a sign. Then he wants another sign. Then he does one small act of holy vandalism, before asking for more signs. This type of worry exposes a massive sin. Gideon is essentially saying "I know God said He wants this, and that He'll see it though... but maybe I thought of something He didn't, so I'll ask again." When we decide to second guess the direct commandment of God we're saying the exact same thing.

Jesus however, trust the Father on a level we aren't capable of on our own. When the enemy suggests He throw Himself off a cliff to see if God will save Him, Jesus scoffs and tells Satan that God already commanded us not to put Him to the test. Jesus knew His mission so He didn't need a sign. Jesus has a perfect connection with the Father and with the voice of the Holy Spirit so he doesn't need a sign because He has their presence.

The bad news is that you and I are naturally like Gideon, and we don't have that perfect connection that Jesus does. Today spend some time praying that you can move past the anxieties of Gideon and start moving towards the presence of God. We don't need a sign, because we have a savior.

- What causes you the most fear and anxiety in your life?
- How can you ask God to help you with that? (P.S. it's also ok to ask for help from a counselor or a doctor!)

# DISCUSSION GUIDE: SEPTEMBER 28, 2025 WEEK FOUR: JUDGES 6

This week we learned about the anxieties, initial victories, and ultimate downfall of Gideon. Today your campus pastor will go into further depth about Gideon and how his calling in chapter 6 should change the way we live our lives and follow God. They will also point out the many ways in which these chapters show us our need for Jesus.

ACTION STEP	-
How will I live out the action step this week?	

# **SERMON NOTES**

### **CONNECT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: WEEK 4**

- Have you ever been afraid? What was it that you were afraid of at that time? Did you try to run, or hide, or fight? WHat did you learn from that situation?
- In Judges 6 Gideon's fear and reluctance take center stage. How can GIdeon's weaknesses teach us to trust God more?
- When Gideon tears down the altar, the men of the town seek him out to kill him. THis proves they wanted release from consequences, but not from their sin. What are specific problems that we deal with in our culture that people often want to hang on to? How does this happen inside the church as well as out in the word?
- Gideon's father recognized what was right and stood up for him after he tore down the altars to Baal. How can you stand up for people who are doing the right thing? How can you wisely and peacefully critique public figures who mix truth and error in their message?
- God pursued Gideon even though he was fearful.
   How can you continue to evangelize your friends, neighbors, family and coworkers even when they are reluctant?

## **WEEK FIVE**

### DAY 1: JUDGES 6

In our second week on Gideon, I want to take some time to focus on particular aspects of what he did at different places throughout the story. Today, I'd like to focus on verses 25-32 of chapter 6. This is a section where we see Gideon do the right thing, but at the same time we see him do it in a way that reflects his fear and anxiety, rather than his trust in God.

For generations at this point, God's commands and the reasoning behind them were clear. God told His people not to live among the Canaanites, not to intermarry with them, and to not even tolerate their presence in the land. He didn't want His people to fall into idolatry, and foolishly abandon Him for false gods. At this point in the story though, we know that's exactly what happened. Because that happened the Israelites had been oppressed by Midian for 7 years. There's a strange and interesting problem here though, God made it clear that they were being oppressed because of their idol worship, but for some reason they refused to stop. Gideon's first task was to go into the middle of town and destroy the altar to Baal... because there was still an altar to Baal! After 7 years of consequences the people of Israel still wanted to worship Baal. So much so that Gideon did this task at night out of fear. A well founded fear too, because the next day the men of his own tribe demanded his death because he had replaced the altar Baal with an altar to God. So not only were the people of Israel refusing to give up their idolatry, they were willing

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to fight to protect it. God was having to save people against their own will.

I don't want us to read past this detail and miss the overwhelming significance of it. This one little piece of information tells us so much about our sin and the hold it has on us. Israel knew what the source of their suffering was. They knew that God couldn't tolerate it. They knew that they could call on Him and repent. Even with all of that knowledge, they didn't care. Because that's what sin does. That's why God tells us to build barriers and flee from sin. The very thing that is killing us becomes the thing we cling to for comfort and safety, and no amount of knowledge will ever set us free.

Gideon could tear down the altar and replace it, but he couldn't change the hearts of the people. Gideon's father could call out the men of the town and expose their blasphemy, but he couldn't keep them from returning to it. This is why we need Jesus instead of Gideon. We need someone who can change us from the inside out. Someone who can change our desires instead of our circumstances.

As you read today I'm going to ask you to pray a difficult prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you where you're still clinging to sin. We all do it. We all have those places where we don't want God to change our hearts and minds because that would mean changing our lives. It's probably going to hurt,

but the pain of conviction is so much better than the comfort of sin because it brings us closer to Jesus.

- Have you ever done something you knew was wrong?
   How did that make you feel?
- Today as you pray, ask for an equal measure of mercy and conviction.

### DAY 2: JUDGES 7

Chapter 7 will be our main focus this week. It's also one of the most well known stories in the book of Judges, and for good reason. The lead up to the battle defies all conventional wisdom. Then the battle itself is one of the most unexpected twists ever. With today being the second time we've read this chapter I'm sure you're starting to see all the ways God works miracles with methods we could never predict, but did you know that this is also one of the strongest recurring themes throughout Scripture?

Gideon's victory wasn't that he beat Midian in a fight. God made sure no one would ever even think that was possible by the way it happened. No, Gideon's victory was that he trusted God when he was asked to do something. That's it. That's the theme. It's not our actions that prove who we are, it's whether or not we take GOd at his word. The Bible actually tells us

that this is the ONLY thing we can do that's a righteous deed at all. Genesis 3-11 shows how sin corrupts our very nature so that even if we do something that should be good, it's not righteous because of our sinful intentions and desire that we can't change. Jesus reaffirms this in the book of Matthew where he clarifies that our intentions and our actions have to be perfect at all times or it counts as will evil. (Matt. 5:17-48)

Genesis 15 however, tells us about what God does count as a good deed. Genesis 15:6 says that: "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." By all accounts, Abraham wasn't a great guy. He was a cheater, he sold his wife a couple times, and he was pretty loose with the truth. Even in the face of all that, God was willing to count his belief as Righteousness. Gideon was a coward most of the time. He was willing to completely abandon and disobey if he thought it would spare him from conflict. In victory he was demeaning and vindictive. Yet God still saved him and the people of Israel, because in the middle of Judges chapter 7 Gideon was willing to trust God when human logic screamed "no."

The Bible tells us that the only thing we can do is believe. For you and I that means believing in Jesus. Believing that He is who He said He is, and that He really did live a perfect life, and gave that life up for us, then rose from the dead. If God can so easily defeat an army of Midianites, then He can save you as well. Today is the day to believe Him, and take Him at His word.

- The Bible often shows us broken people being used by God. How should this inspire you?
- How should this same truth lead us to better evangelism?
   No one is too broken for God!

### **DAY 3: JUDGES 8**

Last week in our reading of chapter 8 we discussed how Gideon quickly forgot about God when he was confronted with the slight irritation of a neighboring tribe. This week we have to move to the second part of the story, where it gets significantly worse. Even though Gideon was too afraid to tell the men of Ephraim that God chose the method of battle for His own glory, Gideon still clearly believes that God will be faithful in the total defeat of Midian so he continues to pursue the fleeing army.

The men are exhausted, but they press on anyway and along the way Gideon comes across two towns where he asks for food and supplies. The town wants no part of this because they don't want to be held accountable if Gideon doesn't win. It's really important to note here that these are Israelite towns. These are HIS own people. I think we can very quickly condemn these towns because they should have also trusted God, but that is not the end of the story. Even without help, Gideon catches the fleeing kings of Midian and executes them.

Now at this point Gideon would have returned home and called Israel to repent and remember God. Instead he decides to torture and interrogate a child then go back and torture and murder then men of the towns who refused to help him.

Once again, these are his own people. Gideon isn't calling them away from idols, he's committing murder in the name of his own pride. Yes, what those villages did was wrong, but Gideon doubles down and becomes even worse than the oppressors he just faced. Gideon's victory hasn't even been reported yet, and he has abandoned the ways of God for pride and wrath. Every action Gideon takes in chapter 8 shows us that human leaders won't cut it. We have too many fears. We have too much pride. The only thing we love more than our idolatry is ourselves. That's why we need Jesus. We need a leader who will stay on the narrow path of God's will. We need a leader who isn't controlled by selfish pride and fickle emotions. The more we learn from the cycle of Judges, the more we realize that we need God Himself in human form.

- Why is it such a temptation to put our trust in human leaders even though we fail so often?
- How can we support or correct our human leadership in a God honoring way?

### **DAY 4: 1 SAMUEL 13**

One of the most important things we can learn about reading the Bible is that humans aren't the main characters, and they certainly aren't the heroes. Yes, it's tempting to call Gideon a hero when he trusts God and gets to be there for the defeat of Midian, but then in the next chapter we see his sin come to the forefront. God is always the hero, so we have to resist the temptation to glorify the human characters. However, there's a few characters we can always count on to be the bad example and do the wrong thing in the most spectacular ways. My favorite of these bad example characters is definitely King Saul.

In 1 Samuel 13 Saul has a very similar situation to Gideon in Judges chapter 7. The Philistines are camped near Saul just like the Midianite camp was near Gideon. Where Gideon got specific instruction to whittle down his army, Saul was instructed to follow the law and wait for Samuel the priest to make the sacrifice. This was a really important law. Only the priest could make the sacrifice. Kings were not allowed to act as priests. Think of it as God's version of separating the powers of Government to protect His people from corruption. In the same way Gideon was losing men so God could be glorified through miraculous victory, Saul was also losing men because they were scared to wait.

The big difference in the story is that Gideon chose to trust God, but Saul decided to take matters into his own hands. Saul doesn't wait. He breaks the law and defies God and just does the offering himself. When Samuel shows up, Sauls has a long list of blames and excuses, but none of that can cover up the fact that he simply chose to trust himself over God. Samuel outright tells us that had Saul waited God would have also given him a miraculous victory, but instead God will now reject him as King.

A massive part of what we have to learn as believers is how to trust God when we feel like we know better. We have to learn to trust God even when our anxiety is screaming in the back of our heads. We have to learn that the outcome doesn't matter, but that trusting God is always the goal. So what can we learn from Saul's bad example? When times get tough, that's the moment to trust God the most. Even someone as fickle as Gideon received a massive blessing when he trusted God. Saul received a curse because he decided his plans were better. Today, I'd ask you to examine your life. Where are you trusting God even if it seems crazy? Where are you deciding that your own ways are better? It's never fun to admit when we're failing, but it's necessary if we want to embrace trust and put our sin behind us.

• Why are leaders often held to a higher standard than others?  Is there anywhere in your life that you are choosing your own way instead of God's?

### DAY 5: JOHN 6

In our stories we've studied this week, we've seen Gideon go from paranoid, to trusting, then fall into petty vindictiveness. We also saw that King Saul examined the ways of God and then just decided his own way would be better. Specifically we saw how each of them reacted when their followers began to walk away. To finish out this week, we need to ask ourselves the same question we asked on bracelets in the late 90s: What would Jesus do?

We see that answer in John chapter 6. Jesus amasses a large following as He goes about teaching. When He sees this crowd He has compassion on them and feeds them in a miraculous way. Here is where we get to start drawing interesting parallels between all the chapters we've read this week. Just like the time of Gideon and the time of King Saul, the time of Jesus also saw Israel under oppression from an outside force.

Gideon wanted to drive out the midianites. KIng Saul wanted to defeat the Philistines. Jesus however, has no interest in defeating or driving out the Romans. Where Saul and Gideon had gathered their armies for battle Jesus walked away from the crowd to reject their battle entirely. Does this mean that Jesus didn't care about oppression and conflict in the land? Of course not. Jesus knew that no matter how many invading armies were defeated, the sin that set all this in motion would still plague the people. Jesus wasn't there to treat the symptoms. He came to destroy the root cause of all suffering on Earth.

In the end of the chapter we also see that Jesus loses a good deal of the crowd that is following Him. Gideon lost men so that God could make sure the Army wasn't able to take credit for His victory. Saul lost men because they were nervous and didn't trust anyone. Jesus however thins out His own crowd. As they gather round Him asking for more food, Jesus draws the hard line. He explains to them that only He can provide for them because He is the bread of life. Most people in the crowd interpret this as cannibalism and leave disgusted. Others simply don't want to follow Jesus unless He's giving them exactly what they ask for.

In our other two stories it was the trust of the leaders that was tested. Yet in this story the followers are the ones who have their trust tested. In the other stories Gideon and Saul wanted victory to avoid pain and death, but Jesus took on our pain and our death so that He could gain the ultimate victory.

So as we finish the week, I'll ask you this question: Are you following Jesus even when the odds are stacked against you? Are you following Jesus only when times are easy and His teachings are simple? Are you only following Jesus when He gives you what you want? Are you trying to seize Him by force and make Him the leader of your political, economical, or cultural movement? Take a deep self examination and ask yourself: When the crowds start to walk away, will I trust Jesus and stay the course?

- What are some of the teachings of Jesus that cause people to walk away from Him in our time?
- Have you ever tried to present Jesus as something He's not?
   (A political leader, a business model, a cultural tradition?)
   How can we make sure we accept Jesus for who HE says
   He is?

# DISCUSSION GUIDE: OCTOBER 5, 2025 WEEK FIVE: JUDGES 7

This week we got to see God win a great victory in Israel. Gideon finally trusted God and God rewarded the entire nation. We also read the story of King Saul who failed to do this and suffered greatly for it. Today your campus pastor will explain why God sometimes stacks the deck to prove how powerful He is, and how we can trust Him in those overwhelming situations.

ACTION STEP	
How will I live out the action step this week?	)

# **SERMON NOTES**

### **CONNECT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: WEEK 5**

- Have you ever made one small decision that spiraled out of control? Was it a wrong turn? A bad food choice? Why does it often feel like small decisions end up with huge consequences before we even know it?
- Judges 3 tells us that cycles of sin and oppression begin when the people "forget" about God and what He has done. How do you make sure to remember God in your life?
- Judges 3 also says that God allowed certain enemy nations to remain in the land as a "test" for the people. What situations in your life test you? If you can't remove a situation, how can you make sure you don't fall into patterns of sin around the situation?
- In the book of Judges we see numerous leaders come and go. Each one does their part, but the issue begins again. How and why does this point us to our need for Jesus?

## **WEEK SIX**

### **DAY 1: JUDGES 6**

This is the last week we'll be spending on the three chapters about Gideon. We've seen that this is a turning point in the book, where the author begins to show us details about Israel's corruption and idolatry as well as the weakness and failure of the available leaders. We've discussed Gideon's hesitance, his anxiety, his moment of trust, and his rapid downfall. What we haven't yet discussed is what God does right before He calls Gideon.

In chapter 6 God actually sends someone to explicitly explain why the oppression is happening and what the Israelites need to do to stop it. It's within this prophetic message that we find yet another reason to Worship God. The prophet literally could have just walked around the countryside yelling "STOP IT!" God had been sending prophets and messages for generations telling the people of Israel to follow His command and reject the false gods of the Canaanites, but even so He sent a prophet in the days of Gideon to remind Israel about His care for them in the past.

Before he even told them to back away from idols, he saved them from slavery in Egypt. Before He sent them to war with Canaan, He parted the Red Sea for them. Before the cycles of sin and oppression in Judges, He provided for them in the wilderness. Israel should have known this. It was their job to repeat it every day and teach their children. They broke rules they knew not to break, and got the exact punishment that had been foretold. Yet, even in this moment of their rebellion, God chose to remind them of who He is and what He has done for them. He reminds them that they are giving away glory, trust, and love that belong to Him and Him alone.

It's never fun to be corrected, but when it comes to God correcting us we should see chapters like this and worship HIm for His mercy and His care. There may come a time where you and I have to correct each other in the church. May we do so with the same attitude as God. Too often we revel at the consequences that others face without ever considering our own failures. If you are part of church then you will interact with people who mess up quite often. As a fellow believer let's be good enough to offer gentle corrections with the hope of repentance and restoration. Let us never seek to inflict pain on someone else when mercy is available. Let's be like God and care more about the people than we do about the idea of what we're owed. Even when we are wronged repeatedly, let's offer everyone the mercy and grace of Jesus that He's already shown to us.

- How can you show mercy and grace to the people in your life this week?
- Take a minute and thank God for all the ways He has rescued and protected you.

### DAY 2: JUDGES 7

Each time we've walked through the story of Judges 7 the focus is on how the victory was won because Gideon decided to trust God and follow His instructions. I think there's one more detail that needs to be analyzed though. Gideon was able to trust God in that moment because God preemptively gave him a sign. He knew Gideon. He knew Gideon before He called him to save Israel. God knew Gideon before the world was even created, and when God chose him He took Gideons' fear and anxiety into account.

That's why God tells Gideon in verse 9 that it's time to attack, but then also gives him a way to soothe his fears. Gideon is able to spy on the camo and hear a dream that foretells God's victory and it's enough to inspire him to follow God and make the attack. God is delivering Israel, even though they still cling to their idols. God is performing a miracle even though Gideon doubts. God is doing what's good, and right, and just because that's who He is! Not because of Gideon, not because of Israel, not even because Midian deserves it, but because God Himself is good.

Sometimes we get caught in the trap of thinking that we will never be strong, or smart, or charismatic enough to be used by God. We see our own flaws and the enemy's voice inside of us tells us not to even try. This story however, proves that God is ready and willing to use you for His kingdom even with all of our failures and shortcomings. Our deficiencies will never catch God by surprise. He knew about them when He called you. He knew about them when He made you. He knows about problems you have that YOU don't even know about, and He still called you to Himself.

So don't wait. Don't try and fix yourself before joining the mission. This isn't a sports team, or a job application. You don't need to improve your resume, you just need to trust God and go tell the world about Him. Yeah, you're probably going to mess up a few times... but God knows about that too and He will always be ready and waiting to forgive and restore you.

- What causes you to doubt yourself? What causes you to doubt that you can be used by God?
- How can the Bible and the Church help you gain confidence in following God?

### **DAY 3: JUDGES 8**

Have you ever watched water go down a drain? It makes that little spiraling whirlpool as it flows out. Now, the top of that spiral is a big circle, but the second loop is a bit tighter. As that spiral reaches the bottom the circles get tighter and tighter

until they're stacked right on top of each other. The cycle in Judges is a lot like that. After Ehud there was 80 years of peace in the land. After Deborah there was only 40 years. Every time this happens the people seem to forget more quickly and the downward spiral begins to tighten.

Judges 8 shows us just how bad that can get, and why Gideon's story is less of a turning point and more of a downward acceleration. In an earlier devotion we saw that Gideon and the men of Ephraim began to forget God even before the victory was complete. Sadly this doesn't stop with a single leader or even a single tribe. In chapter 8 verse 22 the whole of Israel says ""Rule over us, you as well as your sons and your grandsons, for you delivered us from the power of Midian." Do you see how quickly that turned? The entire kingdom just credited Gideon instead of God. This story began in chapter 6 with a prophet reminding them about all the times God has saved them, it peaks with a miraculous victory that was engineered so only God could receive credit, but it devolved into Gideon's vengeance and now into a complete rejection of God.

In his book "Judges for You" Tim Keller points out that there is a big difference between repentance and regret. An attitude of repentance shows that we hate the sin that caused all of our suffering, but regret only hates the consequences. Israel shows that they didn't want to return to God, they didn't want their idols torn down, they just wanted to live without consequence.

Gideon's compromise with the people turned out to be even worse. He refused to take any responsibility, but still asked for the type of monetary tribute that a king or a foreign ruler would receive. To make matters even worse he created his own version of an idol in his village. An Ephod was to be worn by the high priest in the temple, but Gideon made his own and posted it to act like an oracle. Israel is worse than where they started because now they're even using God's own symbols for idolatry. Think of this as similar to the KKK using the cross as their symbol for hatred and violence.

The sad ending of Gideon should be a warning for us. Let us never use the words or symbols of God as an excuse to practice our own sinful desires. A compromise is often worse than an outright rebellion because it tells the world that God agrees with our evil. This story should always serve as a reminder that as bad as the consequences are, it's our sin we should flee from. It should serve as a warning for us to never forget the God who sent Jesus to save us.

- What are symbols that should point us to Jesus that humans have tried to corrupt?
- Is there anywhere in your life that you are regretting consequences, but not repenting from sin?

### DAY 4: EPHESIANS 2

The terrible lesson of Gideon's story is how quickly we can forget about the God who saved us, and how that willful ignorance can create suffering and steal God's glory. I wish I could tell you that this was a one time incident between Israel and Gideon, but sadly this is a characteristic of humanity in general. The idolatry we see in Judges 6-8 is a mild offense compared to what we'll witness in the rest of the book. It doesn't stop there either. We'll see it again as the Kings of Israel lead their people to be even worse than the Judgers ever could. We even see something like this in the New Testament.

When the New Testament church began it was primarily made up of Jewish people who realized that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah and the fulfilment of all the prophecies. God very quickly made it clear that ethnicity or lineage was not a test for entry. The church was supposed to spread this Kingdom to every nation on the Earth, and that anyone who believed was welcome. This is great news... but it also came with some difficult adjustments. The former Jewish people of the church welcomed the belief of the Gentiles, but they had quite the struggle with accepting their differences and their culture. There was a massive movement within the church that demanded every believer must become culturally and functionally Jewish to follow Jesus. The division between Jews

and Gentiles and how this culture war was opposed to the Gospel becomes a major theme of the New Testament.

Ephesians 2 is a reminder of the great equalizer. Especially verses 1-10 remind us that no one has any claim on their own to any form of righteousness and that before we met Jesus we were all equally sinful. Yes, each person's sin looks different and different manifestations of sin have different consequences, but we were ALL equally condemned and helpless without Jesus. This is a truth we need to be reminded of every day. We should have humility, because we are all in need of Jesus. Even if your life looked proper by the world's standards, we were headed to the same eternal death as the worst tyrants in history. So when we see sin in the world, it's our job to warn others of its consequence, but only so we can offer them the redemption of Jesus.

Gideon began to think he was owed the riches of a king and took credit for God's victory. Israel thought their ethnicity should make them culturally superior among believers in the church. In our day it can be tempting to believe that our wealth, our upbringing, our church attendance, or our political stance makes us superior to someone else. When we get that temptation let's remember that everyone who has ever lived has the same need for Jesus.

- Have you ever taken glory that belonged to God? How can you repent from that?
- How can you welcome and create peace with believers from other backgrounds and cultures?

# DAY 5: NUMBERS 21:4-9; 2 KINGS 18:1-8; JOHN 3:4-16

Three separate passages? None of them are even in Judges? Is this a devotion or a scavenger hunt? I promise it will all make sense here in just a few minutes. Gideon's arc went something like this: The people rejected God, there was a consequence for that rejection, the people cried out to God, He sent them a method of deliverance, then because of human sinfulness, even that deliverance was used as an idol.

The story of the bronze serpent is a very similar arc. The people grumbled against God in the wilderness, they got attacked by snakes, they were pretty upset about the whole snake thing, they cried out to God for relief, and God delivered them through an image of a snake that required them to trust Him in faith. But did you see what happened in the passage from 2 Kings? That same bronze serpent that was supposed to inspire trust and dependance on God became an idol and had to be torn down. The people wanted blessing and mercy from an

object, but not from a God they had to love and obey. It seems the cycle of Judges extends far beyond the pages of the book. God sends us mercy and we turn it into an idol.

These stories also have another big theme in common too: They're supposed to point us to Jesus. Gideon was raised up to deliver a nation that was helplessly suffering from their own sin. The bronze serpent was raised up to save people from the consequences of their own sin. Jesus came down from Heaven to do the same. Gideon's trust in God received a blessing when the enemy was defeated, and the people of Israel were healed when they trusted God to heal them as they looked on the image of their pain. In the same way Jesus defeated the enemy that oppressed us all and we can be healed if we look to Him and trust God to save us. That's why we also read John 3. Jesus basically explains this whole concept in that chapter. Every prophecy and miraculous salvation points us to Jesus and what He came to do.

The bronze serpent offered healing because God wanted people to see the image of their sin and trust His healing. When Jesus was raised on the cross the same thing happened. We needed a better healing, so the serpent pointed us to Jesus. Gideon won a massive victory against all odds, but he immediately fell. We needed a better leader than Gideon, we needed Jesus. The book of Judges can be exciting, violent, disturbing, and confusing, but its point is the same as everything else. The

book of Judges, the story of Gideon, the failures of the people all point us to Jesus.

 Make a list of Bible characters that you've studied. How does each character point us to our need for Jesus?

# DISCUSSION GUIDE: OCTOBER 12, 2025 WEEK SIX: JUDGES 8

This week we will be concluding the story of Gideon. This marks a point of no return in the Judges cycle as the people of Israel begin to forget and abandon God before the victory is even won. We also covered that the failures of human leaders should point us to our need for a true savior in Jesus because He is the only one who can change our hearts instead of just our circumstances. Today your campus pastor will walk you through the end of this story and help us all understand how human failure underlines our unstoppable need for Jesus.

<b>ACTION STEP</b>			

How will I live out the action step this week?

# **SERMON NOTES**

### CONNECT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: WEEK 6

- Why was Gideon so intimidated by the men of Ephraim at the beginning of chapter 8? Why did he not explain to them what God said?
- How did the towns of Succoth and Penuel reveal their lack of trust in God when they refused to help Gideon?
   How should Gideon have reacted to them instead of doing the evil things he did?
- Gideon went from anxious, to groveling, to vengeful, to stealing God's glory for himself. How can we create structures of accountability in our lives that will help us from falling into the same patterns?
- In the end, the people of Israel wanted Gideon as a king. Although Gideon said the right words about being ruled by God, he still asked for a king's tribute. How is compromise like this often worse than outright rebellion?
- How did Jesus succeed and prove his righteousness in each of the places Gideon failed?