

01

SESSION ONE

The Report of the Twelve Spies

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we will study the story of the Israelites failing the test of faith as they were called to enter the promised land. Like the Israelites, when our faith fails we start looking at our strength instead of God's, and we forget both the power God has demonstrated in the past as well as His future promise. When our faith fails, we need a faithful representative who will plead to God in our place. As you work through this passage, ask the Spirit to examine your heart and grow your sense of gratitude for the greatness of God's faithfulness.

SCRIPTURE

Numbers 13:1-2,26-33; 14:1-20

THE POINT

Even through our faithlessness, God remains faithful.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Life is hard. Beyond the objective realities that we face in the world like disease, natural disasters, and death, there are other complications that happen along the way. Every day is filled with moments for decision-making. Some are simple, and some will change the course of your life.

Moments of decision come frequently in our lives, and the same was true of the people described in the Bible. As our journey through the story line of Scripture continues, we join the children of Israel as they approach the brink of the promised land. The God who promised to bring salvation to the world through the seed of Abraham has rescued Abraham's descendants from their slavery in Egypt. After years of traveling through the wilderness, the Israelites have arrived at the doorstep to the land God promised. But before they enter, they are confronted with a decision that requires faith.

- **When have you faced a decision that required faith? What helped or hindered your faith during that time?**

Option 2

Is it OK to be afraid of some things? What's the difference between healthy and unhealthy fears? Display a variety of emotion-stirring images, such as a kitten, puppy, snake, shark, and so forth. What is your reaction to each of these? What emotions are stirred by each image?

Invite students to name some popular horror movies they're familiar with. Share that in 2013, the top 11 horror movies brought in \$1.75 billion dollars worldwide.¹ What do you think is the draw of scary movies?

- **How are these fears similar to the fear you face when it comes to making big decisions, or finding out a close friend or family member has been critically injured or diagnosed with a terminal illness?**
- **How does this kind of fear affect you emotionally? physically? psychologically? How does it affect your faith in God?**

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

Even through our faithlessness, God remains faithful.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Moses:** chosen by God to lead His people out of captivity and to the promised land
- **Caleb and Joshua:** Israelite spies appointed by Moses to scout the land of Canaan

PLOT

As we continue our adventure into God's story, we pick up where we left off with Moses and the people of God on their way to the promised land. We have seen a lot unfold since the Israelites departed from their Egyptian captivity until now. The people have experienced more of God's faithfulness and sovereignty, but they've sinned more as well. And as they stand on the precipice of the promised land, they are going to once again see how the human heart fails to trust in God, despite all of what God has done for them.

The apostle Paul wrote that the story of the Israelites in the wilderness is given as an example for us (1 Corinthians 10). As we look into this story, it is important that we look past the Israelites and into ourselves, seeing if we, too, fall victim to unbelief within our own lives.

Remember, every time you see this bar in the leader guide, it indicates the same material is also found in the personal study guide as well.

THE PEOPLE LOOK TO THEIR OWN STRENGTH

The time had come for the Israelites to move into the land God had promised. Centuries earlier, the Lord said that through Abraham He would make a great people (the nation of Israel), send them into a great land (Canaan), and provide great blessings through them. Now, the Lord is ready to move them into that land. But here is where the obstacles arise, tempting Israel to look to their own strength instead of God's.

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel. From each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a chief among them." [...] And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the people of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh. They brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. And they told him, "We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negeb. The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the hill country. And the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and along the Jordan." But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, "Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it." Then the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are." So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, "The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them." (Num. 13:1-2,26-33)

Consider the incredible report the spies brought back about the beauty of the land. Moses, Aaron, and all of the Hebrews received amazing news.

The early part of the spies' report could be summarized like this: "It's better than you can possibly imagine!" They said it "flows with milk and honey." The natural resources of the land were like nothing they had seen before.

But, as is often the case we find in the Old Testament, the Israelites faltered in their faith. Right on the heels of describing the land as everything they could

TIMELINE

SCOUTING THE PROMISED LAND

The spies deliver their report.

THE BRONZE SERPENT

The people look and are healed.

THE PARTING OF THE JORDAN

God calls Joshua to lead His people.

hope for, the spies also described why it was impossible to possess. Note the word *however* that shows up in verse 28. With that one word, the spies' report shifted from the goodness of God's promise to the difficulty of possessing the land.

In the face of the dangers present in the promised land, all but two of the spies lost their faith. Joshua and Caleb were ready to forge ahead, but they were outnumbered by spies who believed the fortified cities were too great for God to overcome. When their faith had faltered, and their eyes were no longer on the promise, they only saw an unconquerable force before them.

- **Provide paper and instruct students to make two columns. In one column, guide students to list the good things the spies reported about the land. In the other column, list the obstacles that were mentioned.**
- **Which list received more attention? Why?**

THE PEOPLE FORGET ABOUT GOD'S PAST WORK IN THEIR LIVES

How did the people respond once their faith began faltering? They didn't reflect on what God had done in the past, nor did they look forward to God's future promise. They were overcome by fear of death and despair. Watch how the author describes their faithlessness:

Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?" And they said to one another, "Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt." Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the people of Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes and said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, "The land, which we passed through to spy it out, is an exceedingly good land. If the LORD delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their protection is removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them." Then all the congregation said to stone them with stones. But the glory of the LORD appeared at the tent of meeting to all the people of Israel. And the LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them? I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they." (Num. 14:1-12)

When the leaders lost their faith, the people of Israel faced a crisis. Once the majority of spies said there was no hope, the Israelites went from wondering, to mourning, to outright rebellion. In the heat of the moment, the people's rebellion escalated. They took the position—which can only be described as ridiculous—that they would be better off dead! The people contemplated the merits of having died as slaves in Egypt or having died in the desert wanderings. Here's a warning for us: The loss of faith includes a loss of good sense. To wish for death when you are on the edge of God's promise is the result of a faithless heart.

Choosing death or slavery at the moment seemed a better option. They were ready to stone Moses to death and then try their luck crossing the wilderness back to Egypt. Their choice was based on a total lack of memory. All that God had done was somehow no longer in their minds. They neglected the power of God displayed in the past as well as the promise of God for their future.

Moses and Aaron fell down in a posture of repentant prayer. Joshua and Caleb, the only two spies who had kept their faith, tore their clothes in a sign of mourning. They responded this way because the rebellion of the people was a sin against God and grieved their souls.

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

To ensure that the people clearly understood the gravity of both their history and their present circumstances, the Lord personally visited them. As Joshua and Caleb bowed down and cried out for the people to remember God's presence among them, God did the work Himself. His glory appeared at the tent of meeting, and God challenged the Israelites to renew their faith.

In verse 11, God asked, "How long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them?" Because of the people's unbelief in the promises of God, it would be forty years before the people would be able to enter into the promised land. Because of their rebellion and unbelief, the Israelites would have to wait for a younger generation to arise and follow in the footsteps of Caleb and Joshua, believing that God would deliver on His promises.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Faith

Biblical faith is the resting, or trusting, in Christ alone for salvation (John 3:16-21). More than being simply a mental agreement of historical facts, genuine faith begins with a recognition and confession of the truth of the gospel (1 John 4:13-16), followed by receiving Christ as Lord and Savior of one's life (John 1:10-13). Biblical faith is not blind faith; rather, it rests on the historical life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

TIMELINE

THE BATTLE OF JERICHO

Rahab helps the Israelites in their conquest of Jericho.

CONQUEST OF AI

How one man's sin can negatively affect everyone around him.

THE CHARGE TO ISRAEL

The people must make a choice: worship God alone or follow after false idols.

Remember, these sections are optional and can be skipped if preferred.

Whenever you see PSG page numbers listed, it indicates that there is a section in the personal study guide for students to interact with.

- What assumptions did the Israelites make? What did their fear reveal about their trust in God? What did it cost them? (p. 11, PSG)
- How does fear sometimes keep you from following God's plan? (p. 11, PSG)

CHRIST CONNECTION

In this story, we see Moses standing before God as the representative for His people after witnessing their unbelief and sin. We see him pleading with God to show mercy, praying that God would use this circumstance to display His willingness to forgive sin. Listen to the entire account:

But Moses said to the LORD, "Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for you brought up this people in your might from among them, and they will tell the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that you, O LORD, are in the midst of this people. For you, O LORD, are seen face to face, and your cloud stands over them and you go before them, in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if you kill this people as one man, then the nations who have heard your fame will say, 'It is because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land that he swore to give to them that he has killed them in the wilderness.' And now, please let the power of the Lord be great as you have promised, saying, 'The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but he will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, to the third and the fourth generation.' Please pardon the iniquity of this people, according to the greatness of your steadfast love, just as you have forgiven this people, from Egypt until now." Then the LORD said, "I have pardoned, according to your word." (Num. 14:13-20)

When the men stood before God and begged for mercy upon the people, they gave us a picture of what was to come. The people needed an advocate. They had it temporarily in Moses. The problem for us is that Moses died. On top of that, he is still dead! This was a temporary advocacy by a temporary leader in a temporary time. We need a permanent solution.

Only God in the flesh can be our advocate. He lived as we do so He could sympathize with our weaknesses. Israel spent 40 years in the wilderness, wandering around in faithlessness. Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness being tempted by Satan, but unlike Israel, He passed the test. As the perfect representative, He gave the sacrifice we should give in order to grant salvation by His grace and through our faith. He rose from the dead state we could not overcome so as to defeat sin, hell, and the Enemy. And now Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father to intercede for you and me every moment of our existence.

YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **In what types of circumstances do your fears tend to overshadow your faith? What do you turn to for strength in moments when your faith is faltering?** *Answers will vary, but for the first question may include things like stress from school, disappointments over a relationship, trouble at home, and so forth.*
- **Recall a difficult situation from which God delivered you in the past. How can reflecting on the ways God has worked in the past give you strength for your present trials?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What does this story teach you about trusting God with your future?** *One of the things it teaches is the fact that you can trust God to uphold His promises within your life because God is always faithful. He will never leave you or forsake you.*
- **When our faith falters, what advantage over the Israelites do we have today because of the Holy Spirit living in us? What are some ways we can rely on the Spirit's power as we trust God's future promise?** *Unlike the Israelites, Christians have the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which means, among other things, that the presence of God is no longer at a religious and sacred building, but now residing within them. Because of this indwelling, the Spirit comforts and emboldens Christians for everyday living, reminding them of both God's past faithfulness and the certainty of His future promises.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

The Israelite spies lost sight of their identity as the people of God. They were the people of promise, saved by God and commissioned to take the land He had for them. Instead, they looked at some really large soldiers and made a poor assessment of themselves. “Like grasshoppers” is how they saw themselves, but that is not how the Lord saw them. A failure of faith is not only losing faith in God’s power, but losing a sense of yourself as His child.

- **Share of a time when you allowed circumstances to negatively affect your sense of identity.** *Responses will vary, but it may help to offer an experience from your own life to get the conversation started.*
- **Why is it important to know that our identity as Christians can never be changed or altered because of what Christ has done for us?** *For those without Christ, having a sense of identity can be a real struggle, especially when they seek it in accomplishments, activities, or in their personal self-expression. For Christians, however, it is comforting to know that our identity as children of God and followers of Jesus never changes, giving us a foundation for a joyful and God-honoring life.*



HEART

Like the Israelites, we can fall victim to unbelief when it comes to promises of God. One could argue that we do this with every instance of sin in our lives. Every time we lie or covet or lust, our hearts fail to believe in the promises of God that not lying, coveting, or lusting will bring more joy than the fleeting pleasures of sin. We should learn from the Israelites, trusting that because God has always been faithful, we can trust in His promises to work for our good and His glory.

- **Why is God’s past faithfulness a reason to trust His future promises?** *God’s future promises, and the fact that He will always keep them, is rooted in the goodness of His character.*
- **Why do you think faith in God’s future promises comes easier to those who memorize the promises of God recorded in Scripture?** *One of the reasons it comes easier is because having God’s promises on our minds and in our hearts equips us to fight against unbelief. By knowing the promises of God, we can cling to them each day, trusting that God will fulfill each and every one.*



HANDS

Because we have been fully represented before God by Jesus, we now are able to represent God before the people of the world who do not know Him. Today, our calling is not to conquer the nations but to take the gospel to them. No matter if the obstacles make us feel “like grasshoppers,” we trust that God will give us all we need to accomplish His mission.

- **What is an instance of God’s past faithfulness in your life you can share with someone this week?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What is a future promise from God found in Scripture you will share with someone this week?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, point out item #4, which contains cutout quotes from Corrie ten Boom you can distribute to students.

SOURCES

1. Mark Hughes, "Top 20 Highest Grossing Horror Movies of the Last Two Years," *Forbes* [online], 31 Oct. 2014 [cited 18 Aug 2015]. Available from the Internet: www.forbes.com.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPJoshSPR16)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject

Don't forget to check out these additional resources to help equip you for each session.

02

SESSION TWO

The Bronze Serpent

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we see how the Israelites became ungrateful and impatient during their time of wandering, complaining about things like the food and the scarcity of water. Consequently, God sent poisonous snakes into their camp, and many of the people died. In response to their pleas for mercy, God commanded Moses to lift a bronze serpent on a staff. Whenever someone who had been bitten looked at the bronze serpent, they were healed. Jesus later claimed this story pointed forward to His being lifted high on the cross. By trusting in His identification with sinners, we are given eternal life and are called to be His ambassadors.

SCRIPTURE

Numbers 21:4-9; John 3:14-15; 2 Corinthians 5:20-21

THE POINT

The bronze serpent points to both God's punishment of sin and His salvation through Jesus.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Invite students to call out events they look forward to. Some might be yearly events. Some might be once-in-a-lifetime moments. As students share, write their responses on the board or a large piece of paper. (For example: Super Bowl®, Academy Awards®, season finales, holidays, graduation day, etc.)

Share the following information about *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (Disney, 2005): Narnia is introduced as a land locked in an endless winter and ruled by the evil White Witch. Aslan, Narnia's good leader, has been absent from the land for many years. The people look forward to Aslan's return, when the curse of winter will be lifted and the land will begin to thaw.

- **What were the Narnians hopeful for? What did they anticipate, even in the midst of their frozen, broken world?**
- **What were the Israelites hopeful for as they wandered in the desert?**
- **What event do God's people remain hopeful for today?**

Option 2

Provide blindfolds for students and obtain one long rope, tying the ends together. Instruct students to stand in a circle, grab a part of the rope, and put the blindfolds over their eyes. Call out different shapes for the group to form with the rope. Begin with easy shapes like a square or triangle, then move to more difficult shapes like a star. After each shape, encourage students to remove their blindfolds and see how well they did at forming the shape.

- **How was this activity a challenge? What would have made it easier?**

Because you were blindfolded, you couldn't watch and understand how the shape was coming together. You had to be patient, work together, and see how it came together at the end.

- **How is this similar to the situation the Israelites faced in the wilderness? How is this similar to our lives today?**
- **Why do you think God would allow us to wonder what's going on without giving us answers when we expect them?**
- **What are we supposed to do as we wait for God's guidance?**

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

The bronze serpent points to both God's punishment of sin and His salvation through Jesus.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Moses:** chosen by God to lead His people out of captivity and to the promised land

PLOT

In the previous session, we saw how the Israelites refused the opportunity to enter the promised land because of a discouraging report brought by some Israelite spies. As a result, God's people had been condemned to wander in the desert for forty years.

In this session, we see how the Israelites became ungrateful and impatient during their time of wandering, complaining about things like the food and the scarcity of water. Consequently, God sent poisonous snakes into their camp, and many of the people died. In response to their pleas for mercy, God commanded Moses to lift a bronze serpent on a staff. Whenever someone who had been bitten looked at the bronze serpent, they were healed.

Jesus later claimed this story pointed forward to His being lifted high on the cross. By trusting in His identification with sinners, we are given eternal life and are called to be His ambassadors.

TIMELINE

THE BRONZE SERPENT

The people look and are healed.

THE PARTING OF THE JORDAN

God calls Joshua to lead His people.

THE BATTLE OF JERICHO

Rahab helps the Israelites in their conquest of Jericho.

THE ISRAELITES SIN AND ARE PUNISHED

The Israelite people had left slavery behind them. But due to their unbelieving hearts, they still had hardships before them. It was God's heart for them to enter into the land that seemed to flow with milk and honey. But the Israelites were more focused on the overwhelming circumstances of the moment than on the sovereign God who guided them. We saw this play out in the last session, when the people chose to fear the "giants" in the promised land rather than put their trust in the God who promised the land.

In the next scene, we come upon the Israelites as they are traveling toward the promised land. Along the way, God has provided everything they need. Yet, we will see how they spurn the Lord's provisions and affections by grumbling.

From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live. (Num. 21:4-9)

The people's rebellion in this instance shows up in a very simple word: impatient. The group of people who had been miraculously delivered, fed, and clothed by God now turned on Him. In essence, they threw a preschooler-like fit before God because they didn't like the food He provided.

The people went far beyond doubt. They accused God and Moses of treachery. They imagined God had intentionally led them out of Egypt for the express purpose of killing them in the desert. It was a rebellion of epic proportions. By stating such a claim, the people showed they doubted God's character and His Word.

- **When have you become impatient with God? Did your impatience cause you to grumble about what He had or had not done? Explain.**
(p. 16, PSG)

In response to the Israelites' rebellion, God acted quickly. He punished them. It was the type of punishment that would strike fear into the heart of any person. Suddenly, poisonous snakes showed up in the camp. Biting. Infecting. Killing. The people's break in their trust of God was a serious offense. The Lord would not take it lightly. When they spoke out against their circumstances, they were speaking directly against God's character.

Today, we may find it difficult to read about the punishment delivered against sin, but Scripture is clear: Because God is committed to redeeming and restoring all things, sin must be punished and wiped out. Events like this remind us of the costly nature of sin. The Israelites had to once again learn that sin leads to death.

As the rebellious people began to die, they cried out to Moses for help. The man whom they accused of being in league with a God who had deceived them would once again become their advocate. I wonder how Moses reacted at first. Did he shake his head? Roll his eyes? Perhaps he simply wept over their continuous rebellion. Regardless, what we do know is that Moses was willing to plead the case of the guilty before the Lord.

Once God heard the people's penitent cry, He provided a way of restoration through their faith. In an act of divine irony, God instructed Moses to make a serpent of bronze and place it on a pole. If those bitten by the snakes on the ground would look to the snake that had been lifted up, they would be healed.

The word for "look" in Hebrew does not mean a casual gaze or a quick glance. Rather, it indicates fixing your gaze upon something or to look intently. The idea is that the Israelites would have to concentrate their mind's attention and heart's affection.

People in the camp listened to the Lord's word through Moses. As they suffered from poisonous injuries, they looked to the bronze serpent fixed on

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

This incident looks back on two biblical narratives involving serpents. In Eden, God promised Satan (who had taken on the serpent's form) that he would one day be defeated (Genesis 3:15). The snake image lifted high by Moses was a reminder of this promise. Also, when Moses and Aaron confronted Pharaoh's priests, Aaron's staff turned into a serpent and devoured the priests' staff-serpents, a foretaste of the ultimate defeat of all false religions (Exodus 7:8-13).

Unfortunately, however, things God uses for good can become misused. Several centuries after the Numbers 21 episode, Hezekiah became king over Israel. He was a righteous king who destroyed the objects of idolatry in the kingdom. One item was the bronze serpent that Moses used in the desert. For all these years, the Israelites had kept it. At the time of Hezekiah taking the throne, "the Israelites burned incense to it" (2 Kings 18:4). The item that God used in one generation as His instrument of deliverance had become the object of worship in another generation. The people had forgotten God as the true deliverer and, as we are common to do, substituted an idol in His place.

the pole. As they gazed upon it intently, recovery occurred. Doubtless, it was a mystery to them. It is a mystery to us. But, in that moment, God chose the symbol of their sin as the instrument of His mercy.

CHRIST CONNECTION

The story of the Israelites' lack of faith, punishment, and recovery is not one that stands on its own in biblical history. Jesus Himself referenced the story. In John 3, we read of Jesus's nighttime meeting with Nicodemus, a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews during the Roman Empire's occupation of Israel.

Jesus told Nicodemus that a person must be born again in order to enter the kingdom of God. Nicodemus was perplexed. What did being "born again" mean? Was it physical? Was it spiritual? What would it mean to a man who relies on his Jewish heritage? In answer to Nicodemus' question, Jesus pointed back to Numbers 21 and explained how the Son of Man (a reference to Jesus Himself) must be lifted up just like the bronze serpent.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. (John 3:14-15)

Packed into these two verses are several important ideas. First, we see how the original story is a foreshadowing of what Jesus would accomplish several thousand years later. When Moses lifted up the bronze serpent for the people to see, he was providing a remedy for all who would look. Now, Jesus is going to be lifted up for a much broader-reaching recovery. The work done through the bronze serpent was temporary. Jesus' work would be permanent.

Second, the word that is used in the Greek language for "lifted up" is not the pedestrian idea of simply holding something up to view. Rather, the Gospel writer employs a word that means to exalt something. Just a few years after this encounter with Nicodemus, Jesus would be hanging on the cross. While there, He would fulfill the Old Testament prophecies of the divine Son of God, who is fully human, serving as the payment for our sins. Christ would be exalted before the nations, and all who look to Him can live.

Jesus, as He planned to go to the cross, would not become just one more "thing" for the history books. His body hanging upon the cross is not a relic for us to drag around or consider lightly. The bronze serpent offered temporary recovery. Everyone who was healed from the poison of the serpents eventually still died. Jesus was interested in a greater goal. Verse 15 tells us that everyone who believes in Jesus will gain eternal life.

"Everyone" is a powerful word. With it, there are no exceptions. Every single person who believes in Jesus is included in the promise that follows. There are no other requirements. Good grades, good behavior, or popularity status hold no importance. Rather, every person who will believe will be given eternal life.

TIMELINE

CONQUEST OF AI

How one man's sin can negatively affect everyone around him.

THE CHARGE TO ISRAEL

The people must make a choice: worship God alone or follow after false idols.

THE JUDGES CYCLE

Because Israel follows after false idols, God delivers them over to their enemies.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Sin as Transgression

The word transgression means “to cross over” or “to pass by” and is often used in reference to transgressing God’s explicit commands. When God gives a specific command, as He did with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, and when that command is disobeyed, transgression has taken place (Rom. 5:14; 1 Tim. 2:14). In this sense, sin is law-breaking.

When you believe in Jesus, you will gain eternal life. In His high priestly prayer (John 17), Jesus defined eternal life this way: “And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (v. 3). As Christians, we are given an eternal relationship with the God who serves as the payment for sin. The God who wants to save us and be known by us is the One who is willing to be hung like a snake upon a pole.

YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **In what ways can you see your own heart reflected in the attitude of the Israelites?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What does the Israelites' punishment communicate about the seriousness of sin? How does this change the way we view sin in our own lives?** *At the very least, this story communicates once again the weightiness of sin and how all sin is deserving of death. Not only that, but anything less than the deserved punishment of death is mercy and grace.*
- **What is the significance of God's command to the people to gaze at the snake? What truths were the people to consider?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **How encouraging is it to you personally that everyone who believes in Jesus receives salvation? How might this truth impact the way you share the gospel with others?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

There in the wilderness the people were replaying Adam and Eve's sin in the garden. Eve gave in to the temptation to doubt God's truthfulness. Furthermore, she doubted that the Lord had her best interests in mind. The Israelites put themselves in the same position. Their impatience revealed a lack of trust in God's goodness.

- **How did the Israelites' impatience reveal their lack of trust in God?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **Why is it so important to trust God for guidance instead of jumping in and doing things on our own?** *Answers to this question will vary.*



HEART

This session highlights the importance of seeing sin for what it is—an act of transgression deserving of punishment. There are many who do not see sin for what it is, and because of that, feel no remorse to sin's presence in their lives. It is only when we begin to see sin for what it truly is that we will be able to grieve over our sin deeply. When we see it as a direct offense to God, our hearts will be more sensitive to the presence of sin in our lives, fighting against it through the power of the Spirit at work within us.

- **Have you ever thought, *Well, I'm not too bad. I don't do too many bad things. I'm basically a pretty good person?* Before today's session, how did your view of sin compare to God's?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **How will seeing sin as a direct offense to God affect your approach to temptation and sin from now on?** *Answers to this question will vary.*



HANDS

Christians are to represent Christ to those around them, directing attention to Jesus, the One to whom we look and are healed. Whenever a Christian says to a friend or enemy, "Look to Christ and live," it is so much more than what they could imagine. We are inviting the lost to be found, the dying to be saved, the sinner to be made righteous by the very mercy of God.

- **What are some ways we can invite others to look to Christ this week?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **How effective can we be in sharing our faith if we are like the Israelites and show a lack of trust and patience with God? What can we do to be sure that doesn't happen?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, point out item #5, which is an artistic poster of the bronze serpent.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPJoshSPR16)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



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GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject

03

SESSION THREE

The Parting of the Jordan

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we see how God established Joshua as the new leader of His people. Many of the words and actions in Joshua 3 are reminiscent of God's previous words and actions in Israel's history. God was leading His people in a military drill to remind them of His faithfulness, His abilities, and His wisdom. As we see how Israel was reminded to obey and revere God, trusting in His steadfast leadership, so we are inspired to trust in the God who goes before us. Because God is present and powerful, we can trust in Him to guide us into a future that is unknown to us but known to Him.

SCRIPTURE

Joshua 3:5-17; 4:19-24

THE POINT

Genuine faith involves trusting in God and His future promises.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Military soldiers practice drills from boot camp until the end of their military careers. Though learning to march in a group and follow orders is mastered early, military leaders do not abandon the practice and assume soldiers will remember the basics. A drill is practiced because it teaches more than muscle memory and obedience—it teaches generations to come discipline and respect by passing along the legacy.

The Israelites had a legacy to pass along. God led their ancestors out of Egypt and proved His ability to fight for His people and deliver them from foreign territory. He demonstrated His ability to control the hearts of pharaohs and the forces of nature. He even proved His ability to go before the Israelites and make their paths straight.

In Egypt, God instructed the Israelites to prepare a Passover meal and to teach their children the meaning of the Passover throughout their generations (Ex. 12:24-27). His instructions are akin to a military exercise because they teach future generations—through repetition and rehearsal—the value of obedience, discipline, and fear of the Lord their God.

- **What are some spiritual practices that have been passed on to you from older family members or people within your church?**

Option 2

- **What are some things people put their trust in? (For example: car, parent, sports, cell phone, relationship, technology) Is there anyone or anything completely trustworthy on earth?**

The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror™ is a classic Disney thrill ride. Participants step into an elevator with full expectation that it will drop. And drop it does—a whopping 13 stories! Thousands ride the Tower of Terror each year and trust that they will make it out alive. Does this sound like something you would do?

The Israelites had been through a lot since their exodus from Egypt. Now, the person they had looked to for leadership was gone, and they were being asked to trust “the new guy” who was telling them to walk through a river that was so high it was overflowing its banks! Are you kidding me?!

When was the last time you felt uncertain when it came to trusting God with something that was happening in your life? Maybe you were given three huge assignments at once. Or maybe you found out a close family member was diagnosed with cancer.

- **Do you question God’s trustworthiness when life or the future seems out of your control? Why or why not?**

Today, we will see how Israel’s trust in Joshua as their new leader was put to the test. Their response would require faith—faith in God and faith in Joshua as their leader.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

Genuine faith involves trusting in God and His future promises.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Joshua:** one of the 12 Israelite spies appointed by Moses to scout the land of Canaan; chosen by God as Moses' successor to lead the Israelites to the promised land

PLOT

For quite some time we have seen God speak to Moses, giving instructions as Moses led the Israelites on their way from Egypt toward the promised land. Moses had spoken to God face to face (Ex. 33:11) and was an integral part of God's plan for His people.

But in the first chapter of the Book of Joshua, God makes an announcement that serves as a tsunami and sends cataclysmic waves across the face of the nation. It has a catastrophic effect—"Moses my servant is dead." This announcement raises a question for Israel: "What are we to do now without Moses?" For the first time in 40 years the leadership position in Israel is vacant. Moses the liberator, the lawgiver, the intercessor, is dead. And now, it is Joshua who will lead the people into the promised land.

TIMELINE

THE PARTING OF THE JORDAN

God calls Joshua to lead His people.

THE BATTLE OF JERICHO

Rahab helps the Israelites in their conquest of Jericho.

CONQUEST OF AI

How one man's sin can negatively affect everyone around him.

GOD IS WITH HIS PEOPLE

Joshua knew his people were prone to wander away from the Lord. And after deciding not to go into Canaan as God instructed because ten spies had returned with a negative report (Numbers 13:32), they paid the consequences. God did not allow the people who had seen His glory and signs in the exodus to enter the promised land (Numbers 14:22-23). Instead, they were left to wander for 40 years in the wilderness.

Finally, a generation later, God was ready to allow their descendants to cross into the land, so He gave instructions to Joshua:

Then Joshua said to the people, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you.” And Joshua said to the priests, “Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on before the people.” So they took up the ark of the covenant and went before the people. The LORD said to Joshua, “Today I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. And as for you, command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, ‘When you come to the brink of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.’” And Joshua said to the people of Israel, “Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God.” And Joshua said, “Here is how you shall know that the living God is among you and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites. Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is passing over before you into the Jordan. Now therefore take twelve men from the tribes of Israel, from each tribe a man. And when the soles of the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off from flowing, and the waters coming down from above shall stand in one heap.” (Josh. 3:5-13)

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

The language of dispossessing is important here in that “driving out or dispossessing is different from wiping out or destroying. Expulsion is in view, not annihilation. Just as Adam and Eve were ‘driven out’ of the garden (Gen. 3:24) or Cain into the wilderness (4:14) or David from Israel by Saul (1 Sam. 26:19), so the Israelites were to ‘dispossess’ the Canaanites.”¹

God went before Joshua and prepared the way. Joshua would not have to vindicate himself or make himself respected among the Hebrew nation—God would exalt Joshua in the sight of all Israel so they would have the same confidence in his leadership that they had in the long-tenured leadership of Moses. Joshua’s responsibility was to remain humble and trust that God would exalt him.

This is the dynamic of God’s kingdom. Jesus later said that those who humble themselves will be exalted, those willing to be last will be first, those who lose their life will find it, those willing to serve will be great, and those willing to die will live.

- **When have you been reluctant to trust a new coach or new teacher?**
(p. 22, PSG)
- **Do you think you would be more apt to trust that person if you knew God had a purpose for placing him or her in that position? Explain.**
(p. 22, PSG)

GOD’S PEOPLE ARE TO TRUST IN HIS PROMISES

God demonstrated His approval and support of Joshua as His chosen leader of Israel publicly so the Israelites could see that just as God had sanctioned Moses, He was now sanctioning Joshua. The people were to respond by respecting him as they had done with Moses. Their response would require faith—faith in God and faith in Joshua as their leader.

Now, we arrive at the moment where the people’s faith would be tested. Would they believe God as they crossed the Jordan River?

So when the people set out from their tents to pass over the Jordan with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, and as soon as those bearing the ark had come as far as the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the brink of the water (now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest), the waters coming down from above stood and rose up in a heap very far away, at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, and those flowing down toward the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. And the people passed over opposite Jericho. Now the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firmly on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan, and all Israel was passing over on dry ground until all the nation finished passing over the Jordan. (Josh. 3:14-17)

Imagine the scene. You are one of the travelers walking toward the Jordan River. Sure, you have heard the stories about the Israelites of old passing through the Red Sea on dry ground, but they are not here. This is a new generation.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

God Is Omnipotent

God is all-powerful; there is nothing God cannot do so long as it does not contradict His own nature or law. God has power and authority over the universe He created, from the largest solar system to the smallest particle. Affirming that God is all-powerful does not mean that God can sin—since that would go against His perfect moral nature. As Christians, we rest in the belief that the God who has all power is good, and we gain great comfort by knowing that an all-powerful God is working for our good and joy.

Perhaps you think this new generation doesn't have enough faith. Perhaps you're afraid this generation hasn't worshipped enough. Perhaps you reflect on the laws and statutes they haven't kept perfectly, and you wonder if God will do for this generation what He did at the Red Sea. You continue walking—steadily stepping, steadily worrying, steadily having a conversation with yourself about faith—or your lack thereof.

The priests make it to the edge of the Jordan. As they step in, you see the waters to the north rise up in a mass a good distance away. The waters to the south, going toward the Salt Sea, have been cut off. You blink. The Jordan River is at flood stage (Joshua 3:15), yet the land before you is dry. A virtual interstate has opened for this generation.

JOSHUA BUILDS A MEMORIAL TO GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

As the Israelites arrive safely on the other side of the Jordan, they don't want to forget this moment. The story goes on to demonstrate the value of memorials and examples in Joshua 4:19-24:

The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they encamped at Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. And those twelve stones, which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal. And he said to the people of Israel, "When your children ask their fathers in times to come, 'What do these stones mean?' then you shall let your children know, 'Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.' For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over, so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever." (Josh. 4:19-24)

TIMELINE

THE CHARGE TO ISRAEL

The people must make a choice: worship God alone or follow after false idols.

THE JUDGES CYCLE

Because Israel follows after false idols, God delivers them over to their enemies.

DEBORAH

God gives personal gifts to be used for His glory and the good of others.

Joshua commanded twelve men representing the twelve tribes of Israel to bring stones from the middle of the Jordan and to set them up at Gilgal. Those twelve stones would form a memorial for generations to come. Joshua anticipated the children of future generations asking their parents, “What do these stones mean?” In essence, he was creating an opportunity for the Israelites to tell their children that the stones were a memorial and reminder that God had made a way for Israel to pass through the Jordan River on dry ground. The stones would remind Israel of what God could do, since they came from the place where the priests stood while Israel crossed the Jordan.

The stones had a story to tell. This is an indication of the obligation that parents have to share with their children the story of God in the history of the Jewish people as expressed in Deuteronomy 6:7: “You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”

CHRIST CONNECTION

God told Joshua and the Israelites to set up memorial stones to remember what God had done to bring them into the promised land. On the night He was betrayed, Jesus told His disciples to remember the sacrifice He was going to make to save us from our sins. When Christians eat the Lord’s Supper, we remember God’s plan to destroy sin through Jesus’ death and resurrection.

God calls us to remember and to testify about His power. When Moses questioned God about his leading the people, God turned Moses’ rod into a snake. God said that miracles would happen so “that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you” (Exodus 4:5). God calls us to tell the story to one another and to unbelievers so they might believe.

YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **Why was it important for God to assure Joshua of His presence and power? In what ways does God “go before us” in the struggles of our life?** *By demonstrating His power and presence, God was affirming Joshua in the mission ahead, letting him know that he was not entering this battle alone. Likewise, we can be encouraged that God is with us through the battles we face, knowing that He is ultimately in control and is working all things for His glory and our good.*
- **As a young leader following in Moses' shoes, what fears do you think Joshua might have had? How would you have felt?** *Joshua might have felt inadequate or ill-equipped to follow in Moses' shoes, perhaps wondering if he was a worthy candidate.*
- **How can you encourage others in your student ministry when it comes to stepping out in faith and obedience to God?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **Like Joshua, what are some “stones” in your own life that serve as reminders to God's faithfulness?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

Joshua informed the people that God would perform mighty acts on the next day (Josh. 3:5). The mighty acts were not described; however, they were anticipated. It was the people's responsibility to prepare themselves for what God had planned. This often takes place through the act of consecration, which is not just getting rid of outward distraction, but includes wholeness of the heart, an inner preparation for God to move in us and through us. The people needed to be ready for the miracles God would perform on their behalf.

- **Why is it important to be spiritually prepared for God to work in mighty ways?** *It is important because genuine faith is active, not passive, and should produce within us reasonable expectations to see God work and move both for His glory and our good and joy.*
- **What are some examples of things we can do to prepare our hearts?** *Answers to this question will vary.*



HEART

Our story in this session is a vivid picture of the necessity of following God and doing things God's way in order to inherit His blessings. We witnessed a younger generation who, unlike their parents, didn't witness all of the miracles related to the exodus. Yet, they believed and trusted in God, and that faith commitment was revealed in their willingness to take God at His Word.

- **Do you think the people's faith was strengthened at the sight of the Jordan parting? Why or why not?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What are some things you have witnessed that have increased your own faith in God?** *Answers to this question will vary.*



HANDS

All these miracles took place in order to give testimony to people everywhere that God is almighty and is to be feared and worshiped forever. Just as the stones had a story to tell, you and I have a story to tell.

- **When was the last time you were able to give a testimony to God's powerful work in your life?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What kinds of thoughts, feelings, and fears inhibit you from sharing your testimony? What are some ways we can help one another overcome any hesitation to testify to God's power?** *One way to overcome fears is by simply recalling specific acts of faithfulness from God in your own life. By focusing on what God has done for you personally, not only do you alleviate any fears regarding your ability to share the gospel, but you also make much of God by sharing with others what He has done in your own life.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, point out item #6—an interactive poster representing Joshua’s stone memorial. The purpose of this poster is to provide students with an opportunity, like Joshua, to signify specific acts of God in their lives. One way to do this would be to allow students the opportunity to write on the stones a word or short phrase that relates to God’s past or current work in their lives. It can be anything as general as “God’s grace last summer” or specific as “Mom’s struggle with cancer.” No matter the descriptions, the point is for this to serve as a reminder for students God’s work of grace in their life.

SOURCES

1. Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster?* (Baker Books, 2011), p. 181.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPJoshSPR16)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
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04

SESSION FOUR

The Fall of Jericho

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we will read the story of the fall of Jericho. The Israelites were commanded to obey God and follow His unusual instructions in the face of unfavorable odds. We will get to see how God used apparent foolishness to confound the wisdom of the world. We will see the power of an unseen God over visible might. And in the story of Rahab, we will see God extending mercy and grace to anyone who will trust in Him. As believers in Christ, we trust God to fulfill His promises and extend mercy, and for this reason we obey—even when the circumstances appear unusual.

SCRIPTURE

Joshua 6:1-5,15-25

THE POINT

God fights on behalf of His people when they respond in obedience.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Wimbledon 2001 was the scene of one of the greatest dramatic events ever in tennis—at least for Goran Ivanisevic. The former 1992 Australian Open champion had fallen so far from his glory days that he needed the gift of a wild card to enter the Wimbledon tournament. He and the other players probably thought his presence would not be much more than an uninteresting rerun. He had made it to three previous Wimbledon finals and was the lucky loser all three times. This year was different, even though the final included a formidable opponent, double faults, superstition, and doubt. Against all odds, the 125th seeded wild card triumphantly held up the Wimbledon trophy. To say the least, it was an unusual victory.

Joshua 6 contains one of the most dramatic scenes in all of Scripture. There is the protagonist—Israel; the antagonist—the city of Jericho; the rising action—the marching around the walls of Jericho once a day for six days and seven times on the seventh day; and there is the climax—the walls of Jericho come tumbling down! Like Ivanisevic's win many years later, Israel's dramatic victory was against all odds.

- **What obstacles are you currently facing that seem insurmountable?**
- **When have you been surprised by the way God worked something out in your life? How does remembering how God has worked in the past help you to trust Him with the future?**

Option 2

Begin a discussion about students' relationships with their parents. You might consider sharing a personal experience or memory from your own childhood about a time you chose to obey your parents and are glad you did, even though you didn't understand at the time the reason behind what they were asking. Don't get too involved or deep with this discussion, but ask questions such as: Would you consider yourself an obedient child? Why or why not? Would your parents consider you to be an obedient child? Why or why not? Think about the last instruction you received from your parents. Did you question it? Explain. When you question your parents' instructions, how do they typically respond?

Discuss students' relationships with God, then ask:

- **Would you say you are an obedient child of God? Why or why not?**
- **Is it more difficult to obey God than it is your parents? Explain.**
- **What's your motivation for obeying God?**

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God fights on behalf of His people when they respond in obedience.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Joshua:** chosen by God as Moses' successor to lead the Israelites to the promised land
- **Rahab:** spared from the destruction of Jericho for hiding the two Israelite spies Joshua sent to determine the strength of the city

PLOT

In the previous session, we saw God prove Himself faithful once again by parting the waters of the Jordan River for Israel to cross. Whether or not the Israelites thought themselves worthy, God delivered on His promise. Now, the Israelites find themselves in need of supernatural intervention yet again. Though they have seen God open the Jordan River on their behalf, they wonder how He will help them overcome the formidable walls of Jericho.

TIMELINE

THE BATTLE OF JERICHO

Rahab helps the Israelites in their conquest of Jericho.

CONQUEST OF AI

How one man's sin can negatively affect everyone around him.

THE CHARGE TO ISRAEL

The people must make a choice: worship God alone or follow after false idols.

GOD PROMISES VICTORY

At the start of Joshua 6, we know that God has promised Israel victory in the promised land. But the plan He is about to reveal doesn't seem to make much sense. It offers no assurance of a military conquest. It has nothing to do with military might, and it does not include common weapons of warfare. Take a look:

Now Jericho was shut up inside and outside because of the people of Israel. None went out, and none came in. And the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor. You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days. Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. And when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people shall go up, everyone straight before him." (Josh. 6:1-5)

Picture this. The city of Jericho is on lock-down. Its gates are up because the inhabitants are fearful of Joshua and the Israelites. No citizen of Jericho is allowed to exit the city, and the king of Jericho and his army are trying vigilantly to prevent the Israelites from entering.

And to top it off, the Israelites are given somewhat of a strange battle plan! How could marching around the wall of Jericho one time for six days and seven times on the seventh day ever bring down massive walls that were wide enough, according to the ancient historian Josephus, to accommodate driving two chariots side by side? Can you imagine the priests as they listened to Joshua repeat God's instructions? They probably wondered if Joshua was hearing God as well as Moses had heard Him. Surely Joshua had missed a portion of God's instructions, right? Wrong.

God used a seemingly foolish battle plan to accomplish His purpose. As Paul says in the New Testament, "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong" (1 Cor. 1:27). Throughout this action plan, we see that the Israelites must be involved. God will execute what the Israelites implement. God's people must participate in the battle of Jericho by marching around the city, and as a result God will give them victory by bringing down the walls. By acting in faith, these massive walls will implode upon themselves without a bulldozer or a wrecking ball because God Himself will bring them down.

- **What questions do you think you might have had after hearing Joshua's instructions?** (For example: How is all this marching going to bring down a wall? What's the point of blowing trumpets? Shouldn't we plan a sneak attack and scale the walls instead?) (p. 28, PSG)
- **Have you ever questioned something you sensed God leading you to do? If so, how did you respond?** (p. 28, PSG)

THE PEOPLE RESPOND IN OBEDIENCE

Joshua delivered God's marching orders, and the people prepared for victory by obeying. So they marched around the city once a day for six days.

Can you imagine the self-talk going on in the minds of the Israelites? God forbade them to speak (6:10), but it is difficult to stop that little inside voice from murmuring. It might have sounded like this: *Of course Joshua has the faith to follow these instructions. He was close to Moses, and the in-crowd always has inside knowledge. Or, I just don't understand how walking will bring down this wall.*

Regardless of any inward doubt, the Israelites obeyed God. They marched in silence around Jericho's massive wall once a day for six days. Were their feet tired? Were they exhausted? Were they yearning to whisper a small complaint to a neighbor or friend? Maybe the mighty men of war felt embarrassed as they marched in silence. Or did they feel a sense of renewed strength because they were doing the will of God in God's way?

Finally, the moment of truth arrived. The seventh day. The final instructions. And here's where we pick up the story:

On the seventh day they rose early, at the dawn of day, and marched around the city in the same manner seven times. It was only on that day that they marched around the city seven times. And at the seventh time, when the priests had blown the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, "Shout, for the LORD has given you the city. And the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the LORD for destruction. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall live, because she hid the messengers whom we sent. But you, keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction, lest when you have devoted them you take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel a thing for destruction and bring trouble upon it. But all silver and gold, and every vessel of bronze and iron, are holy to the LORD; they shall go into the treasury of the LORD." So the people shouted, and the trumpets were blown. As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people shouted a great shout, and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they captured the city. Then they devoted all in the city to destruction, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys, with the edge of the sword. (Josh. 6:15-21)

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

When it comes to the driving out of these people groups from the promised land, it is important to remember that God was willing to wait about 430 years because “is not yet complete” (Gen. 15:16). In other words, Israel’s conquering of this land was a form of judgment by God in light of the people’s sins. And to demonstrate the long-suffering patience of God, He waited more than four hundred before finally judging them for their unrepentant sins.

What kind of wickedness did the Canaanites keep pursuing? All kinds of sexual sin, even as far as incest and bestiality, in addition to child sacrifice (Lev. 18:20-30), among others. According to one biblical scholar, “The evidence for profound moral corruption was abundant. God considered them ripe for divine judgment, which would be carried out in keeping with God’s saving purposes in history.”

Not only that, but in regard to the seemingly harsh language of destroying everyone, “the average person isn’t going to pick up on the fact that this stereotypical ancient Near Eastern language actually describes attacks on military forts or garrisons, not general populations that included women and children. There is no archaeological evidence of civilian populations at Jericho or Ai. ... The use of ‘women’ and ‘young and old’ was merely stock ancient Near Eastern language that could be used even if women and young and old weren’t living there. The language of ‘all’ (‘men and women’) at Jericho and Ai is a ‘stereotypical expression for the destruction of all human life in the fort, presumably composed entirely of combatants.’”¹

TIMELINE

THE JUDGES CYCLE

Because Israel follows after false idols, God delivers them over to their enemies.

DEBORAH

God gives personal gifts to be used for His glory and the good of others.

GIDEON

God gives strength to accomplish His will.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

The World Opposed to God

There are times in Scripture where the term “world” refers to more than the physical planet Earth or the collective human population. In many instances, the term refers to an active and evil spiritual force that is in direct conflict with God and His kingdom. This evil world force operates under Satan’s control (Eph. 2:2; John 14:30), displaying the same self-centeredness and deceit that is found in his character. Christians are called to overcome this world of spiritual evil (1 John 5:4-5) through faith in the Son of God.

At the end of the seventh trip around the wall, on the seventh day, Joshua gave the command. The people shouted before the wall fell—not after. They shouted in faith, believing God had given them the city. God moved at the sound of the shout and brought the wall down in such a convincing way that the text says the wall fell down flat! The word means just that—flat. Not one stone was on top of another.

GOD SPARES SOME OF HIS ENEMIES AND BRINGS THEM INTO THE FAMILY OF FAITH

This story is a spectacular example of God's power exercised on behalf of His people as well as God's judgment over His enemies. But it also contains a thread of mercy. As the conquest of Jericho began, Joshua remembered the oath that the two spies had made with Rahab, who had given them shelter. He sent the spies to rescue her and the family members gathered in her house.

But to the two men who had spied out the land, Joshua said, "Go into the prostitute's house and bring out from there the woman and all who belong to her, as you swore to her." So the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab and her father and mother and brothers and all who belonged to her. And they brought all her relatives and put them outside the camp of Israel. And they burned the city with fire, and everything in it. Only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD. But Rahab the prostitute and her father's household and all who belonged to her, Joshua saved alive. And she has lived in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho. (Josh. 6:22-25)

Make no mistake. Just as God kept His promise to the Israelites in the conquest of Jericho, God will keep His promise in preserving a remnant. For this reason, we trust God and obey Him by loving the enemies of God and praying for them to become disciples of Christ. We reach out and teach through prayer, through the Word of God, and through our testimony.

CHRIST CONNECTION

When Rahab is mentioned in Scripture, she often receives an infamous designation. She is called Rahab "the prostitute." In Joshua 2:1, the two spies entered Jericho and gathered at the house of "a prostitute whose name was Rahab." In 6:17, her name is mentioned again, with that same designation. In verses 22-25, the two spies were told by Joshua to go into the house of the prostitute whose name is Rahab. In Hebrews 11:31, the writer says that by faith "Rahab the prostitute" welcomed the spies and did not perish with those (king and people of Jericho) who were disobedient. James 2:25 refers to "Rahab the prostitute" as someone whose faith was demonstrated in works.

Interestingly enough, it is not until Rahab is associated with Jesus in His genealogy in Matthew 1:5 that this dubious designation is dropped. There, the text says that Rahab married Salmon (not Rahab the prostitute married Salmon). Rahab and Salmon had a son whose name was Boaz. Boaz married Ruth, and they had a son whose name was Obed. Obed had a son whose name was Jesse. Jesse had a son whose name was David, and Jesus is from the line of David, which makes Rahab a great grandmother of the Messiah.

YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What is the difference between faith in God's plan for our lives and our understanding of His plan? Do you, personally, have to understand God's plan in order to have faith? Explain.** *Genuine faith is one that seeks understanding while also realizing that we may not always understand the way God works on this side of eternity. However, even during those times of not fully comprehending God's plan, Christians can trust in God's character and have faith that He is working all things for good.*
- **How do you determine what you believe God is calling you to do? How do others play a role in that?** *When discerning God's calling in our lives, it is important that we first turn to Scripture and see how what we believe we are called to do aligns with God's Word. In addition to that, however, we need to hear from others and be willing to listen to wisdom from godly people in our lives. People like parents, pastors, and youth leaders can help provide wisdom when sifting through decisions in life.*
- **Why do you think God desires to work through our obedience rather than apart from it? What does this teach us about the importance God places on our relationship with Him?** *One thing it teaches is that God doesn't just want passive observers in His story of redemption, but active participants. It also teaches us that faith is more than just personal belief; it results in obedient actions, and God often uses those obedient actions as a means to accomplish His will.*
- **What are some ways Christians can remind one another to focus on and obey God's plans instead of focusing on themselves and/or what others think?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

God's instructions to the Israelites reveal the importance of words and actions. The people could not utter a word until Joshua gave the order to shout at the sound of the long trumpet blast. Perhaps God wanted the Israelites to display their faith in action before speaking with others about the importance of "faith in action."

- **What are some ways we display our faith "in action"?** *Answers will vary, but may include things like prayer and Bible study, serving others, and being involved in church.*
- **How does faith "in action" give added credibility to expressing our faith "in words"?** *We have heard it said that people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. There is truth to that, recognizing that the words of our mouth should be commensurate with our actions; otherwise people might tune us out.*



HEART

The story of the battle of Jericho teaches us a lot about believing in God and taking Him at His Word. Joshua and the people were given specific instructions that, from a worldly perspective, don't seem to amount to much in the way of a military strategy. Yet unlike the generation before them, they chose to believe and trust that with God all things are possible. Because of that, this younger generation demonstrated the true heart of faith in God—believing Him and trusting in His Word.

- **What should true and genuine faith be rooted in?** *The object of our faith is Jesus, and our faith in Jesus is rooted in what God's Word has to say about Him.*
- **How has this session encouraged your own faith when it comes to trusting in the promises of God in Scripture?** *Answers to this question will vary.*



HANDS

Like Rahab, believers are called to share the good news with unbelievers. We are to call people "into the house," letting them know they can be spared from the judgment of God through the blood of Jesus if they trust in Him. God spared Rahab and her family among the Israelites. They were preserved for a divine purpose.

- **How is God's grace on display in this story?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **It is easy for Christians to adopt an "us vs. them" mentality with the world. How should God's promise to save people—even among His enemies—change our mind-set?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, point out item #7, which contains a map of Israel's conquest of Jericho.

SOURCES

1. Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster?* (Baker Books, 2011), pp. 175-176.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPJoshSPR16)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject

05

SESSION FIVE

The Hidden Sin of Achan

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we will study the story of Achan as a part of Israel's battle with the city of Ai. The story of Achan gives us a powerful picture of how one man's sin can affect everyone around him. It shows us the terrible punishment for sin (death) and how God's enemies are overcome, as well as the high cost of being tainted by sin. And it points forward to the glorious hope of seeing sin dealt with on the cross.

SCRIPTURE

Joshua 7:1-12,19-8:2

THE POINT

Sin has consequences not only for ourselves, but also for those around us.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Divide students into teams and instruct each team to choose a representative to answer questions from your state's driver handbook. Team members are allowed to help their representative come up with the correct answers, but only the chosen student can give the answers. Offer a small prize as a reward to the team with the most correct answers.

Discuss why it's important to know and obey traffic rules. What could happen if you disobey the rules (cite specific rules)? Why should you memorize the rules before taking a driving exam? Do the people who make the rules expect you to obey them? Why? How do you know they expect you to obey them?

If you have ever been issued a speeding ticket, then you know there is a large price to pay for not obeying the speed limit. You also know that the consequences affect more than just yourself. (For example: If you hit another car then that driver is affected. If your insurance rates go up, then your family is affected. Etc.) There is also a huge price to pay for not obeying God's rules. God doesn't give you rules and laws to hold you back from having fun. He gives you these laws to protect you and others from harm.

Option 2

Call out examples of partial obedience. For instance: Your teacher instructs you to write a 5-page essay and you turn in 4 pages; your coach calls for 20 pushups but you only do 18; or your boss wants you to clock in right on the hour but you are always 3 minutes late. Discuss the impact of partial obedience in each scenario.

Share the following story: On January 28, 1986, the Space Shuttle Challenger broke apart 73 seconds into its flight, resulting in the deaths of its seven crew members. The Rogers Commission report stated that the disaster was caused by the failure of an "O-ring" seal in the solid rocket booster. The commission not only found fault with a failed sealant ring, but also with officials who allowed the shuttle launch to take place despite concerns voiced by NASA engineers.¹

What caused the shuttle to fail? Why do you think the officials didn't listen to what the engineers told them? Would you say that the officials did most things right concerning the mission? If so, why did things go wrong? Point out how their refusal to listen ended with disastrous results.

What qualifies as "partial obedience"? Would you want someone to build your house who "only sort of" follows the blueprints? Would you want to go to a doctor who does most things right? Why not?

Discuss what partial obedience means in light of our relationship with God. Emphasize that we are called to be totally obedient to Him.

- **In what ways can someone be guilty of partial obedience when it comes to his or her relationship with God?**

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

Sin has consequences not only for ourselves, but also for those around us.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Joshua:** chosen by God as Moses' successor to lead the Israelites to the promised land
- **Achan:** stole items from Jericho that were to be dedicated to the Lord, putting all of Israel at risk of disaster

PLOT

In previous sessions, we've seen Joshua as he has received God's charge to be "strong and courageous." We've watched the children of Israel cross the Jordan River. We've seen God bring down the walls of Jericho and give the Israelites the land He promised Abraham. But now, we see what happens when Israel fails to obey God completely, highlighting once again the cost and consequences of sin in a broken world.

TIMELINE

CONQUEST OF AI

How one man's sin can negatively affect everyone around him.

THE CHARGE TO ISRAEL

The people must make a choice: worship God alone or follow after false idols.

THE JUDGES CYCLE

Because Israel follows after false idols, God delivers them over to their enemies.

ACHAN'S SIN AFFECTS ALL OF ISRAEL

In Joshua 6:27, we read: "So the LORD was with Joshua, and his fame was in all the land." Chapter 7 opens with the conjunction "however" or "but"—"But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things..." Let's take a look:

But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things. And the anger of the LORD burned against the people of Israel. Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-aven, east of Bethel, and said to them, "Go up and spy out the land." And the men went up and spied out Ai. And they returned to Joshua and said to him, "Do not have all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not make the whole people toil up there, for they are few." So about 3,000 men went up there from the people. And they fled before the men of Ai, and the men of Ai killed about thirty-six of their men and chased them before the gate as far as Shebarim and struck them at the descent. And the hearts of the people melted and became as water. Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD until the evening, he and the elders of Israel. And they put dust on their heads. And Joshua said, "Alas, O Lord God, why have you brought this people over the Jordan at all, to give us into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy us? Would that we had been content to dwell beyond the Jordan! O Lord, what can I say, when Israel has turned their backs before their enemies! For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it and will surround us and cut off our name from the earth. And what will you do for your great name?" The LORD said to Joshua, "Get up! Why have you fallen on your face? Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them; they have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen and lied and put them among their own belongings. Therefore the people of Israel cannot stand before their enemies. They turn their backs before their enemies, because they have become devoted for destruction. I will be with you no more, unless you destroy the devoted things from among you." (Josh. 7:1-12)

Joshua sent two spies to the city of Ai, just as he had sent two spies to collect intelligence in Jericho (Joshua 2:1). He was preparing to take the next steps in his quest to conquer Canaan and knew he could not attack the larger cities of

Canaan without being seen by Ai. He needed to conquer Ai to maintain an element of surprise.

The spies returned with a jubilant (and somewhat arrogant) recommendation. “Sir, it will not be necessary to expend the entirety of our military forces in our attack upon Ai. Since Ai is a smaller city (Israel had just defeated a most formidable foe in Jericho), only deploy about 2,000 or 3,000 men to engage Ai’s smaller ranks.”

Joshua usually received his marching orders from the Lord—from how the Israelites were to march across the Jordan River to how they were to march around the walls of Jericho. But this time, he quickly accepted the recommendation and deployed 3,000 men to fight against Ai.

In a surprising turn of events, this small city put the Israelites on the run. Apparently, Israel had forgotten that it was not their army who defeated the much larger city of Jericho—it was the Lord who fought for them. They lost the battle at Ai because the Lord was no longer fighting for them.

Joshua reacted to this shattering news by tearing his clothes and falling on his face before the ark of the Lord. Joshua did not know what egregious act caused God to turn against Israel, but he recognized the signs of God’s disapproval.

In his prayer Joshua sounded a lot like Moses (Ex. 32:12-13; Num. 14:13-16 and Deut. 9:28), who was always concerned about God’s reputation in the surrounding nations. Joshua knew God had not brought the people into the promised land to abandon them. Joshua knew God would not violate His trustworthy name.

The reason for Israel’s defeat was the presence of rebellion in the camp. A man named Achan had sinned, and God associated Achan’s individual sin with the entire community.

Verse 1 says, “But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan ... took some of the devoted things.” Usually, one man (Achan) would be referred to by the first person singular pronoun “he,” and yet this passage uses the third person plural pronoun “they” three times—“they have transgressed my covenant”; “they have taken some of the devoted things”; “they have stolen and lied.” God viewed Achan’s individual sin as a collective sin of the entire community. All of Israel was held accountable.

Sin is destructive. The sins of individual believers affect the family, the church, and the community. Perhaps others knew what Achan did and allowed it to persist. God told Joshua that He would not fight for him and the Israelites until the correction for their sin had been made. Here is Achan’s confession:

Then Joshua said to Achan, “My son, give glory to the LORD God of Israel and give praise to him. And tell me now what you have done;

do not hide it from me.” And Achan answered Joshua, “Truly I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I did: when I saw among the spoil a beautiful cloak from Shinar, and 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels, then I coveted them and took them. And see, they are hidden in the earth inside my tent, with the silver underneath.” So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and behold, it was hidden in his tent with the silver underneath. (Josh. 7:19-22)

- What are some examples of poor decisions teenagers make that negatively impact their families? their church? (p. 35, PSG)
- Recall a time when your sin affected more than just yourself. How might considering the impact of your actions help you to obey God and make better choices in the future? (p. 35, PSG)

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Sin and Death

The ultimate consequence for sin is death—physical death, spiritual death, and eternal death (Rom. 6:23). God was clear to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden that if they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would surely die (Gen. 2:17). The type of death that would result from the fall in the garden of Eden wasn't only physical death, but spiritual death—separation from God. Spiritual death continues in a permanent state when someone dies apart from the reconciling work of Christ, who defeated death through His own death on the cross and subsequent resurrection.

THE BATTLE IS WON WHEN SIN IS DEALT WITH

After Joshua had uncovered the sin in the camp, he did not presume success on the battlefield. This time, He listened to the Lord about the number of soldiers who should fight against Ai. God instructed Joshua to take all the soldiers with him and to go to Ai.

And the LORD said to Joshua, “Do not fear and do not be dismayed. Take all the fighting men with you, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, and his people, his city, and his land. And you shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king. Only its spoil and its livestock you shall take as plunder for yourselves. Lay an ambush against the city, behind it.” (Josh. 8:1-2)

The Lord told Joshua that he and Israel would have a second chance—this was the second time around for them as they faced Ai in battle again. The Lord informed Joshua that Ai would suffer what Israel had suffered when there was sin in the camp—defeat.

TIMELINE

DEBORAH

God gives personal gifts to be used for His glory and the good of others.

GIDEON

God gives strength to accomplish His will.

SAMSON

God uses broken leaders to accomplish His good purposes.

Interestingly enough, although the Israelites were not permitted to keep the spoils in their victory against Jericho, this time God permitted them to take valuables (including livestock) and employ them for personal use. Had Achan waited on the Lord instead of disobeying the Lord's command regarding the valuables of Jericho, he would have been able to take valuables from Ai.

Achan had opportunities to repent. Each time he entered his tent, he knew of his stolen hidden treasure. When Joshua instructed the people to consecrate themselves (Josh. 7:13), Achan should have repented during the process of consecration. Even before Joshua isolated Achan's family, Achan could have repented. Instead, because he hid his sin, Israel suffered a terrible defeat, and Achan lost everything—his life, his possessions, and his family. Sin resulted in death, and only after sin was dealt with could Israel move forward in victory.

CHRIST CONNECTION

Chapter seven ends with these words, “Then the Lord turned from his burning anger.” As frightening as this scene may seem, it is a place of a promise. In Hosea 2:14-15, God promised to one day “make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.” This place where Achan brought trouble upon Israel and then suffered the penalty of death for his sin would one day be a doorway to hope. Though the wages of sin is death, the gift of God is eternal life (Rom. 6:23).

Unlike Achan, who took unlawful things, Jesus Christ came to give the unthinkable—His life for ours (2 Cor. 5:21). Achan died for his sin so that the Lord's anger would turn from Israel. Jesus died for our sin so that we—who, like Achan, were enemies of God—could be reconciled to Him.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What are some examples of one person's sin leading to terrible consequences for others? Why do you think God allowed all the people to suffer when just one man, Achan, committed the offense?** *God created humans as morally responsible agents who are capable of doing good and evil. Not only that, but He created us as social beings, intended to relate to one another as we live out our life in Christ together. Because of these two things, sin has consequences that go beyond the person who commits it. For example: A dad who leaves his wife and kids to pursue his own sin not only affects himself, but also hurts those closest to him.*
- **Ever since Adam hid from God in the garden of Eden, we have been trying to hide our sin. What are some ways we can help one another bring our sin out into the open?** *One way is through confession and accountability. Having one or two close Christian friends that we can share with helps tremendously in the fight for faith.*
- **What happens when we minimize the horrible consequences of our sin?** *One thing that happens when we minimize sin is that we minimize God's grace and the cross of Christ. Think about it: When we make little of sin, then we will naturally think little of the cross of Christ. But when we see sin for what it is, then we will be in awe of the grace of God displayed in the cross.*
- **Why does sin deserve death?** *Sin is an infinite offense against an infinite God, and as a result, is deserving of physical, spiritual, and eternal death.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

As Achan confessed his sin, he described what he did wrong, which happened to be similar to Adam and Eve's sin. They saw that the tree was good for food (lust of the flesh), a delight to the eyes (lust of the eyes), and that it could make them wise (the pride of life). For Achan, the lust of the flesh was apparent when he "coveted"; the lust of the eyes when he "saw ... a beautiful cloak from Shinar, 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels"; and his pride of life when he "coveted them and took them" (Josh. 7:21).

- **How should this story help us avoid falling into greed and covetousness?** *It was greed and covetousness in Achan's heart that eventually lead to his downfall, which should make us all the more vigilant at fighting against these sins when we see them arise within us.*
- **What are some ways this story has challenged your understanding of personal sin?** *Answers to this question will vary.*



HEART

Achan hid these treasures in his tent. It is possible that his family saw him do this. Perhaps they thought it more honorable to keep Achan's secret than risk alienation by divulging his sin. By hiding his wrongdoing, Achan looked innocent on the outside. However, the inside of his tent revealed otherwise. First Samuel 16:7 declares, "man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart" and Psalm 51:6 states that God desires "truth in the inward being."

- **What do you think is taking place in the human heart when someone decides to sin?** *Given that Achan put his own family and fellow countrymen in jeopardy because of his sin, one thing we see is that the heart that sins is a selfish heart, one that doesn't consider others.*
- **When God looks at the inside of your heart, what does He see?** *Answers to this question will vary.*



HANDS

This story reminds us that there is a battle all Christians face—the battle against lingering sin in our lives. But instead of hiding our sin and hoping that no one will call us out, God calls us to wage war against our sin through repentance and faith in Him. As John Owen once said, "Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you."²

- **What are some practical ways we can do battle with sin in our lives?** *One very important way is by memorizing Scripture and using it as an offensive strategy against sin. After all, Scripture, which is the sword of the Spirit, is the only offensive weapon in the armor of God.*
- **If we become lazy in the fight against sin, how might that become a negative witness to non-believers in our lives?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

SOURCES

1. History.com Staff, "Challenger Disaster," History.com, 2010 [cited 28 Aug. 2015]. Available from the Internet: www.history.com.
2. John Owen, *The Mortification of Sin*, (Christian Heritage, 2012).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPJoshSPR16)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



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And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

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06

SESSION SIX

Joshua's Charge to Israel

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we will read the story of Israel's choice to worship Yahweh as their God. Joshua, their leader, was near the end of his life. As he read the book of the Law and gave Israel a choice (worship God or worship idols), he called the people to remember God's faithfulness and to live in light of His salvation. Like the Israelites, we too are called to live in light of God's salvation by worshipping God in sincerity and truth, by putting away our idols, and by following Him in obedience.

SCRIPTURE

Joshua 24:14-28

THE POINT

God's grace and mercy are what motivate His people to live in obedience to Him.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

The nursery rhyme “Five Little Monkeys” is popular in households with little children. Perhaps you know it. “Five little monkeys jumping on the bed. One fell off and bumped his head. Mama called the doctor and the doctor said, ‘No more monkeys jumping on the bed!’”

While this little ditty teaches the principle of subtraction, it also teaches an important life lesson: Learn from the mistakes of others. As we've seen in our study of the Old Testament book of Joshua, the Israelites have had many opportunities to learn from the mistakes of their ancestors and peers. In this session, they are given the choice to either learn from past mistakes or repeat them.

“Purity of heart is to will one thing,” said Søren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher and theologian.¹ Kierkegaard believed we should not think one thing while, at the same time, entertain contradictory thoughts or actions. As leader of the Israelites, Joshua exemplified this kind of wholehearted devotion, and at the end of his life he once again called on his people to choose to follow God.

- **What are some actions that contradict what people say they believe?**
- **Why is it important for Christians to act in ways that line up with what we say we believe?**

Option 2

Use masking tape or painters tape to mark out 3 to 5 different shapes on the floor, each decreasing in size. Instruct all of the students to fit themselves inside the largest shape. Once they have completed that task, move them to the next smaller shape, then to the next smaller, and so on. The smaller shapes, at least the smallest one, should make it impossible to get everyone inside the boundaries.

What was difficult about this game? Why couldn't you fit everyone inside the last shape? (The boundaries got smaller.) Was this frustrating? Why or why not? What are some boundaries we have in our society? Do you ever get frustrated with boundaries your parents set for you? your teachers? your youth pastor? Explain.

- **What are some boundaries God has given us?**
- **Why do you think God gives us boundaries when it comes to how we are to live?**

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God's grace and mercy are what motivate His people to live in obedience to Him.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Joshua:** chosen by God as Moses' successor to lead the Israelites to the promised land

PLOT

After having recently entered into the promised land, and after having seen God work supernaturally in the lives of the Israelites again and again during these military feats, we come to the end of the book of Joshua with a charge for the people of Israel to worship God alone. And as we approach this story in Israel's history, we must face the reality that we, too, have the same personal decision to make each and every day—the decision to worship God alone or pursue false idols around us. Thus, the charge for Israel here is a charge to us as well. And how we respond will make all the difference in our lives.

TIMELINE

THE CHARGE TO ISRAEL

The people must make a choice: worship God alone or follow after false idols.

THE JUDGES CYCLE

Because Israel follows after false idols, God delivers them over to their enemies.

DEBORAH

God gives personal gifts to be used for His glory and the good of others.

REMEMBERING GOD'S WORK OF GRACE LEADS TO WORSHIP AND OBEDIENCE

As we come to the end of Joshua's life, let's look back and reflect on his journey. This was a man who was born a slave in Egypt and who developed as a warrior under Moses (Ex. 17). He followed Moses' instructions and successfully led the fight against Amalek. God had already chosen Joshua and was preparing him for his future role of leading the people of Israel.

God continued to develop Joshua. As the Israelites approached the promised land, Joshua was one of the men commissioned by Moses to spy on Israel's enemies. Only Joshua and Caleb returned with a report aligned with God's promise.

After a long life of faithfulness in leading Israel as Moses' successor, Joshua calls on the people to live in light of God's salvation:

“Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.” (Josh. 24:14)

Joshua gave key instructions that get to the heart of worship: fear the Lord, worship Him in sincerity and truth, and get rid of the gods of your fathers. Joshua's directives implored Israel to serve the God who had saved them.

Notice how Joshua addressed both positive and negative elements in serving the Lord. Positively, the Lord is to be served in sincerity; that is, without hypocrisy and in faithfulness. Negatively, the Lord is to be served by discarding the false gods that the Israelites' ancestors worshipped beyond the Euphrates River in the time of Abraham as well as the false gods they worshipped in Egypt. (Joshua may have been thinking about the spectacle of the children of Israel dancing around the golden calf, which had been made by Aaron to resemble an Egyptian god.)

Though our experiences occur in a different era, God's standard of holiness remains steadfast. Fearing God still means standing in awe of Him. It is easy to imagine standing in awe in the presence of your favorite athlete, singer, or movie star. But just think about it—we are always in the presence of God (Ps. 139:7-12) and should tremble at His displeasure.

Joshua also instructed the congregation to worship God in truth. This is the opposite of pretending. Joshua's words are commands with a tinge of warning: Be people of integrity. God knows our hearts and our inner thoughts.

- **Does it seem strange to you that God would have to remind His people to get rid of their idols and worship Him alone? Explain.** (p. 40, PSG)

- **In what ways are we still like the Israelites when it comes to worshipping God today?** (*p. 40, PSG*)
- **What idols do you need to get rid of in order to worship God in “sincerity and truth”?** (*p. 40, PSG*)

OBEDIENCE RESULTS IN PUTTING AWAY OUR IDOLS

As Joshua continued to instruct the Israelites, he acknowledged that serving the Lord is not something that can be coerced. For our obedience to please the Lord, it must be given willingly. So, Joshua set before the people a choice:

And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods, for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight and preserved us in all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed. And the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God.” But Joshua said to the people, “You are not able to serve the LORD, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm and consume you, after having done you good.” And the people said to Joshua, “No, but we will serve the LORD.” Then Joshua said to the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD, to serve him.” And they said, “We are witnesses.” He said, “Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your heart to the LORD, the God of Israel.” (Josh. 24:15-23)

The Israelites understood the implications of Joshua’s words as they listened to him that day. Like Moses in the previous generation, Joshua offered the Israelites a choice. If it seemed evil for them to serve the Lord, then they could direct their allegiance to a false deity, the false gods their ancestors served beyond the river and whom God proved were fakes. They could choose to serve the gods of the Amorites who resided in the promised land where they were now dwelling, the gods whom Yahweh defeated. The choice was theirs.

Joshua did not offer them the luxury of neutrality—they could not serve the one true God of Israel in addition to their false idols. This is the equivalent of Jesus’ statement, “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate

the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other” (Matt. 6:24a). And then, in one of the great acknowledgments of an individual’s undivided loyalty to God, Joshua affirmed that he and his house would serve the Lord. It was his way of saying, “Even if I and my family are the only ones in Israel who will serve the Lord, we will serve the Lord.”

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

In his study of this chapter, Francis Schaeffer points out rightly that when Joshua challenged the people to choose to serve God and affirmed that this was his settled choice as well, the tense he used implied more than a once-for-all choosing, as if one can make a choice and be done with it thereafter. The tense involves what grammarians call continuous action. That is, it involves the past, but it also involves the present and the future. It is as if Joshua had said, “I have chosen to serve the Lord; I am choosing that same path of service now; and I will go on choosing to serve God until the very end.” Schaeffer writes, “This was the character of Joshua. He chose, and he chose, and he chose, and he kept right on choosing.”

The people responded to Joshua with a congregational “Amen!” This was their verbal understanding that it would be ridiculous to forsake the Lord in order to serve false gods. This commitment was based upon God’s involvement in their history. They knew it was the Lord who had worked wonders from Abraham’s time to Joshua’s in order to keep His promise to Abraham (Gen. 12)—the promise that now had reached a level of fulfillment in their own time. The motivation for Israel to serve the Lord and proclaim Him as their God was God’s faithfulness to them.

But then, Joshua made a surprising statement: “You are not able to serve the LORD.” Was this a statement of judgment? Did Joshua set them up just to tear them down? No. Joshua realistically looked beyond their passionate declaration. He knew that Israel had often forgotten the God who had rescued them. He knew their sinful tendencies and their past unfaithfulness.

God is holy and jealous (Ex. 20:5). For this reason, as Joshua stated, God would not overlook their transgressions or sins. Serving the Lord was a serious matter. It required more than an easy, verbal congregational resolution. Rejecting the Lord would bring serious consequences upon those who forsook Him to serve foreign gods.

The Israelites refuted Joshua’s objection and once again made an affirmative confession: “No, but we will serve the LORD.” We can understand their decision. They knew the fear of crossing the Jordan and felt the ground tremble as the walls of Jericho tumbled down. They knew the awesomeness of God’s might displayed over and over as they possessed land they did not own. In light of God’s salvation, Joshua called the people to put away their idols and to set themselves as witnesses against themselves if they were to disobey.

As we come to the end of this section of Scripture, we see once again the people making a jubilant vow:

TIMELINE

GIDEON

God gives strength to accomplish His will.

SAMSON

God uses broken leaders to accomplish His good purposes.

RUTH AND BOAZ

A glimpse of God’s love in the midst of dark times.

And the people said to Joshua, “The LORD our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey.” So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and put in place statutes and rules for them at Shechem. And Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone and set it up there under the terebinth that was by the sanctuary of the LORD. And Joshua said to all the people, “Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the LORD that he spoke to us. Therefore it shall be a witness against you, lest you deal falsely with your God.” So Joshua sent the people away, every man to his inheritance. (Josh. 24:24-28)

Joshua made a covenant with the people. Joshua wrote these words in the book of the Law of God. He took a large stone and personified it—as if it had ears to hear the resolutions voiced by the Israelites. The stone would serve as a witness, a visible prosecuting attorney against Israel if they did not live out their confession of being faithful to God.

Since the people seemed adamant about sincerely serving the Lord, Joshua dismissed the congregation and permitted them to go back to their homes in their newly assigned territories. The Israelites would bear responsibility for their covenant with God alone, because Joshua would soon die.

CHRIST CONNECTION

Like Joshua, believers must also count the cost, considering what God has done in history and remembering God’s plan for good and not evil to those who believe (Jer. 29:11). Joshua’s faithfulness was rewarded and he was called “the servant of the LORD” at the end of his life (24:29)

Also, like Joshua, we are to have a realistic understanding of our ability (or inability) to obey God perfectly. The beautiful difference between our situation and Israel’s is that we have an even greater leader than Joshua—Jesus Christ, God’s chosen servant, who brings us not into the earthly promised land but into our eternal inheritance. The children of Israel were unable to keep their vows (as we will see in Judges 2:10), but because we have the Holy Spirit living inside of us and guiding us, we are empowered to live in light of God’s salvation and point the world around us to the One who saves.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Justification and Works

Justification is not the result of human effort or good works, but of faith in the righteousness of Christ. Although good works do not lead to justification, justification leads to good works in the life of a believer (Eph. 2:10). Faith without works is dead (Jas. 2:17). While good works do not establish justification, they do verify a genuine faith and make our justification evident to others.

YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What would you say are characteristics of worship done “in sincerity and truth”? What would be the opposite?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **Joshua committed himself and his family to serving the Lord. What are some ways that a family today can grow together in devotion to the Lord's service?** *Answers might include praying together, reading and memorizing Scripture together, serving in the church together, etc.*
- **Joshua placed a physical stone that all could see to remind the people of their commitment. What are some reminders in our own lives that help us remember our calling to live in light of God's salvation?** *Answers might include looking at the brokenness of the world around us and how that might remind us to live like Jesus to a lost and hurting world. Also, if one regularly journals, he or she might be able to look at past entries and see the faithfulness of God in bringing him or her through difficult times, which can also serve as a reminder to live faithfully to the Lord.*
- **Why is it important that we see our obedience as a result of salvation and not as a way of earning salvation?** *If we get the ordering wrong here, we end up having a works-based mind-set when it comes to salvation. The Bible is clear that no one can earn salvation through any amount of good works, but that salvation is a free gift of God's grace through faith in Jesus. By having the right perspective, we will come to realize that true obedience is the result or fruit of first being made right with God. In other words, we seek to live obediently because of God's work of salvation in our lives.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

Joshua charged Israel to get rid of the foreign gods among them. The Israelites made their promises, but as we will see, they did not do away with these idols, unlike their ancestor Jacob. When faced with a similar situation, Jacob buried the false gods in his possession at Shechem, which is the same place where his descendants now stood (Gen. 35:2-4). It is interesting how the struggles of one generation are the same as those of another, and that each person in his or her own generation must decide to walk in obedience.

- **When it comes to faith, why must people make decisions for themselves and not simply inherit it from their parents?** *The Israelites Joshua addressed here faced the same decision Jacob did when it came to false gods and remaining faithful to the one true God. But because the people did not do away with these idols, it appears that instead of owning the faith of their father Jacob, they merely adopted it when it was convenient only to discard it later.*
- **Why do you think some temptations and struggles are faced in every generation?** *Answers to this question will vary, but overall, the human heart is the same in every generation, having the same inclinations toward sin from generation to generation.*



HEART

Let it never be forgotten that it costs something to be a true Christian. To be a mere nominal Christian by just going to church is cheap and easy work. But to hear Jesus' voice and to follow Him, believe in Him, and confess Him requires much self-denial. It will cost us our sins, our self-righteousness, our ease, and our worldliness. And it will cost us the heart idols we so desperately cling to. It is a costly grace, but one that brings us lasting joy.

- **What are some personal heart idols you struggle with?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **Why does self-denial actually bring us more joy in the long run?** *Because saying no to the fleeting pleasures of sin affirms the eternal joy that awaits those in Christ.*



HANDS

Joshua made a deliberate decision that he and his family would be obedient to God and remain faithful to Him rather than fall in line with what everyone else was doing in the surrounding nations. This is the type of deliberate decision we are called to every day when trying to live in obedience to God. God calls us to put away our idols and display for the world a new way of living, made possible only through salvation in Jesus.

- **Why do you think a deliberate decision to live obediently is a decision that must be made daily?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What are some areas where you can live differently from the world this week?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

SOURCES

1. Søren Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing*, (Rough Draft Printing, 2014).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPJoshSPR16)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject

07

SESSION SEVEN

The Judges Cycle

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session we will take a look at the second chapter of Judges, which is in essence a summary statement for the whole book. We will see how the Israelites did what was right in their own eyes, leading to an ongoing cycle of sin, judgment, and deliverance. We will also see how God raised up deliverers who brought temporary peace but ultimately demonstrated their own need for salvation. The Book of Judges reveals to us the idolatry that results from rejecting God's authority. Today, as those who follow King Jesus, we are freed from this pattern of sin and empowered to do what is right in God's eyes.

SCRIPTURE

Judges 2:11-19

THE POINT

Judgment of sin occurs when people turn from God and do what they think is right in their own eyes.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Share the following information about the Comet airliner: Designed and built in Britain, the Comet was the world's first passenger jet airliner. It revolutionized air travel and was the pride of the British aviation industry until the first of three crashes happened in March 1953. "One fragment collected from the scene of the crash showed that a crack had developed due to metal fatigue near the radio direction finding aerial window, situated in the front of the cabin roof. The investigators found that a small weakness such as this would quickly deteriorate under pressure, and would rapidly lead to a sudden and general break-up of the fuselage."¹

What were the signs that the airliner had become weak in some places? According to reports based on data collected after the crashes, investigators found signs of metal fatigue. Over time, these areas of weakness had given way and caused the planes to crash.

What are some ways fatigue can affect people? (mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually) In what areas are you weakest once fatigue begins to set in? How does this affect your focus?

As we will see in today's study, time and again God's children would show signs of weakness in their faithfulness to Him. Like the Israelites, our faithfulness to God can fail when we lose focus.

- **What are the warning signs that you are beginning to lose focus on God?**
- **When have you been unfaithful to God? What caused you to lose focus on Him?**

Option 2

In 1954, William Golding wrote a novel where a group of well-educated, well-behaved English schoolboys crash into the paradise of a deserted island with no adult survivors. The book, *Lord of the Flies*, posed the question as to what would happen to these young adults. Would they use their privileged upbringing and knowledge to create a new society of peace, or would something else occur?

As the story progresses, we see that instead of creating harmony and peace, these little boys fight for power, hunt and kill each other, and even cut off the head of a pig and sacrifice it to an imaginary and yet utterly real "beast" on the island. Golding uses this beast as a symbol for the evil in the heart of every person, even children, and ultimately shows the consequences of what the world would look like if all rule and authority were removed and rejected.

Golding's book, selling more than 15 million copies, is popular not because it's so unbelievable but because it's so terrifyingly possible. The underlying moral logic of the story is an imaginary outworking of the truth about the nature and condition of our own hearts. We are a people who constantly reject God's rule and authority over our lives, while going through life and making decisions based on what we, as individuals, believe to be right and wrong.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

Judgment of sin occurs when people turn from God and do what they think is right in their own eyes.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

PLOT

The Book of Judges presents a cycle of sin and salvation that becomes a pattern for God's people. In the previous sessions, we saw the incredible influence Joshua had on the Israelites. As Moses' successor, Joshua led Israel to great victories. The walls of Jericho came down. Joshua and the other elders were a positive spiritual influence on the people, counseling them to walk in the ways of the Lord.

But when Joshua died and his generation was no longer on the scene, "there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel" (Judg. 2:10). This is where our story picks up, with the Book of Judges and a section of Scripture that introduces us to the leaders God gave Israel to govern them and rescue them from their enemies.

TIMELINE

THE JUDGES CYCLE

Because Israel follows after false idols, God delivers them over to their enemies.

DEBORAH

God gives personal gifts to be used for His glory and the good of others.

GIDEON

God gives strength to accomplish His will.

THE PEOPLE TURN FROM GOD TO IDOLS

The spiritual state of Israel, after the death of Joshua, is sad to see. While we heard the Israelites testify in the previous session that they would worship God alone and reject the false gods and idols from the surrounding nations, we witness this dedication slip away in the generations following Joshua's death. Instead of worshipping God alone, we now see that abandoning God leads the Israelites to embrace idols:

And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals. And they abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the LORD to anger. They abandoned the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth. (Judg. 2:11-13)

What led to such a quick descent from the faithfulness of God to the faithlessness of the next generation? The young people did not “know the LORD” or what God had done for them (v. 10). They failed to remember God and His glorious rescue of their ancestors. The previous generations saw God deliver His people from Egypt, sustain His people in the wilderness, go before His people in battle, and scatter His people's enemies. Yet within a generation, the young people didn't know God or His works.

Perhaps this serves as a warning to us: Faithfulness to God does not pass from generation to generation through the genes. We don't inherit our parents' salvation, and we can't expect our children to inherit ours. For this reason, we must be diligent to pass on the knowledge of God to the next generation.

Not only that, but it's also important to recognize that we are called not to merely pass on information to the next generation, but to pass on the faith. The problem with this generation of Israelites was not that they did not “know” cognitively what the Lord had done. The problem was that they did not know God personally. “Know” here refers to intimate knowledge. Their relationship to God was not precious to them.

Forgetting the promises of the Lord leads to making decisions apart from the Lord. They did what was “evil in the sight of the LORD.” God, not us, determines what is right and good, and what is sin and evil. This is the calling card of sin: We think we know better than God. The Book of Judges may be best known for the last verse of the book that sums up what sin is: “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 21:25).

- **Have you ever been unfaithful to God because you were more concerned about yourself than obeying Him? Explain.** (*p. 48, PSG*)

GOD JUDGES THE PEOPLE

We've seen how God's people turned away from God and decided to worship the idols of the pagan nations around them. So what will God do in response? Well, we know that God keeps His promises, and one of the promises He made was to discipline them if they persisted in disobedience. (See Lev. 26:17; Deut. 28:15.) That discipline takes place when God hands over the people to their enemies.

So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them. And he sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. Whenever they marched out, the hand of the LORD was against them for harm, as the LORD had warned, and as the LORD had sworn to them. And they were in terrible distress. (Judg. 2:14-15)

God's anger over idolatry should not surprise us. It is the natural outworking of His exclusive love for His people. As we've studied the story line of Scripture, we've seen how God describes Himself as "jealous"—not in the possessive and selfish way that humans often experience jealousy, but jealous for us and for our good. God is angered by our sin because of the harm sin brings to us and because of the offense our sin is to Him.

How did God respond to His people's rebellion? He gave them what they wanted. They wanted to be like the surrounding nations, so He delivered them into their oppressive hands. One of the ways God punishes sin is by giving us what we ask for.

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

Some people may read this passage and be struck by the reference to the "anger of the LORD" that "was kindled against Israel." Isn't this the God who is "slow to anger" and "compassionate," the One who shows mercy to generations? Yes, it is. The God of love is the God who is angered here. But this anger is faithful because it is rooted in His unflinching love for His people.

To resist the portrait of God's anger in this passage is to miss the point. It's like saying, "I want God to love me and be happy when I leave Him for other gods." You can't have it both ways. If you want God to love you, then you can't expect God to be happy when you choose idols over Him. For God to be passive and nonchalant over your sin, for Him to simply shrug His shoulders at your rebellion, would not be love at all.

Imagine a husband who says, "I love my wife so much I'm happy for her to go out with other men." Ludicrous, we'd say. If he truly loved her, he would flare with jealousy. Love and exclusivity go together. Anger at betrayal is faithful, not unjust. In a similar way, God's anger at Israel is rooted in His deep and lasting commitment to His people's good.

God's anger toward sin is expressed in two ways: the first is passive, and the second is active.

God's Passive Anger: This is when God allows us to experience the consequences of our sin in order to show us how foolish we were to walk away from Him. In this passage we see how God, in His anger, "handed them over" to the marauders.

Why does God allow people to experience the consequences of their sin? So that we'll turn back to Him as Savior. Often, we think of God's wrath as lightning bolts crashing down on us from the skies. But sometimes, God's wrath is expressed in giving us what we want, in handing us over to our own desires.

Examples of this kind of punishment abound in Scripture. We'll see it later in the Old Testament when Israel rejects God as king and demands a king like those of other nations. God lets them have a king . . . and all the problems that come from frail and fallen human authorities. We will also see it in the story of the prodigal son, when the father allows his son to go his way, face the consequences, and then return.

God's Active Anger: Sometimes the consequences of sin are passive; they are inherent in the sin themselves. But other times God's punishment is more active. This is when God disciplines us and calls us back to Himself. A good example of this kind of discipline is in the story of Jonah. Jonah was rebelling against God and running away from Him, and God appointed a storm, a big fish, sun and scorching wind, a plant, and then a worm to drive him back to God.

In this passage, we see elements of both the passive and active sides of God's anger toward sin. We see the passive: "He gave them over" (v. 14). We also see the active: He "was against them for harm" (v. 15).

THE PEOPLE CRY OUT AND GOD DELIVERS THEM

As we've come to expect from previous stories about an incredibly gracious God, judgment isn't God's last word to His people. As the author of Judges continues to summarize this difficult time in the history of Israel, he shows that after God's discipline came God's salvation.

Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they whored after other gods and bowed down to them. They soon turned aside from the way in which their fathers had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the LORD, and they did not do so. Whenever the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge, and he saved them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge. For the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them. But whenever the judge died, they turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them. They did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways. (Judg. 2:16-19)

TIMELINE

SAMSON

God uses broken leaders to accomplish His good purposes.

RUTH AND BOAZ

A glimpse of God's love in the midst of dark times.

SAMUEL HEARS

Samuel hears from God.

When you put verses 14 and 16 side by side, you may find yourself scratching your head. God handed His people over to the enemy, and then He saved them from the enemy? How does that work?

God was delivering His people from their enemies not because His people had fully turned their hearts away from idols and back to Him, and not because they were truly repentant. He was delivering them because of His great love. He was compassionate toward them in their misery, and so He showed them undeserved kindness through the judges He raised up to save them.

The cycle of the judges continues after each moment of deliverance. As you see at the end of this passage, whenever the judges died, Israel returned to sin and their downward spiral of corruption.

CHRIST CONNECTION

It's often said that the way you can discover a person's true nature is to take away external constraints: no rules, no filter, no teacher, or no chance of being caught. In the case of the Israelites, once the judges disappeared from the scene, the people slipped headlong into sin again. Even God's kindness in delivering them didn't always lead them to faithfulness. "The people served the LORD" according to Judges 2:7. But by Judges 3:6, the people "served their gods."

What Israel needed is the same as what you and I need today—not a temporary deliverer but a Savior who would change their hearts. The good news for us is that in the person of Jesus Christ, God is both our great Judge and our great Savior. In Christ, we are set free from these continuing patterns of sin and destruction so that we are also free to carry out God's mission in the world. As believers, we know that Christ has redeemed us from this endless cycle of sin and despair. So when we struggle with remaining sin, we are to confess quickly (Jas. 5:16) in light of God's patience (2 Pet. 3:9). His kindness toward us is what shows us His loving heart—even in the times He disciplines us and calls us back to Himself.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

God Is Just

God established standards for His moral creatures that are in accordance with His righteousness, and all people will be judged according to those righteous standards (Lev. 11:44-45; Rom. 2:5-11; 2 Cor. 5:10). It would be an injustice if God did not uphold His righteousness, for such a failure would require God to violate His own righteous character. Since humanity has sinned by failing to live up to God's righteous standards, God has taken it upon Himself to make provision by being both just and the justifier of those who place their faith in Christ (Rom. 3:25-26).

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What can we do to make sure we don't forget God's past work in our lives and in the lives of others?** *Answers may include things like Bible reading and memorization, keeping a journal, prayer, etc.*
- **What are some ways we are tempted to do what is right in our own eyes? What are some examples of our culture living this way?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What are the dangers of deciding for ourselves what is right for me or right for you?** *There are many dangers that could result from this belief in moral relativism. In essence, this would lead to the belief that all things are permissible.*
- **When have you sensed the Lord's kindness to you despite your relationship being strained because of your sin? How did the Lord's kindness affect you?** *God's kindness and love toward us, even while we sin, should move our hearts toward repentance.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

The time of Judges is really no different than our own when it comes to moral relativism—the belief that objective right or wrong doesn't exist, but rather people get to decide for themselves what is true, right, and wrong. Of course, this notion of relativism is absurd both logically (it is self-contradictory) and morally (it is really difficult to live out the belief that nothing is objectively wrong in the face of racism, human trafficking, the Holocaust, etc.) Relativism fails not only on account of these arguments and many more, but primarily on account that God exists, and He alone determines what is true, right, and wrong.

- **How would you answer someone who was arguing for relativism?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **How does belief in God change the way we think about moral decisions in our lives?** *Since God is the moral lawgiver, determining what is right and wrong and holding us accountable for our moral decisions, we should see our moral decisions as having more weight than we sometimes do.*



HEART

One of the interesting things about sin is the fact that it doesn't stop people from worshipping. In the case of the Israelites, we don't see them stop worshipping altogether—they only stop worshipping God. The people worshiped idols instead. Thus, sin is not the ceasing of worship but the sinful redirection of worship away from God and toward idols. Sin, at its root, is a worship problem, which makes it a heart problem.

- **What are some modern day idols that we see redirect people's worship away from God?** *Answers may include technology, pop culture, personal ambition/achievements, hobbies, etc.*
- **What are some ways to prevent our hearts from being redirected to these false idols?** *Most of the things we make into heart idols are not bad in themselves; they only become bad because we allow them to direct us away from God. For those heart idols, one way to prevent their redirection is to recognize that these things were never intended to take the place of Christ on the throne of our hearts.*



HANDS

By embracing relativism, the Israelites abandoned God in order to serve idols, and this abandonment led to conformity. Think about it. The temptation to worship false gods came from the temptation to conform to the world around them. They forgot that they were called out of the world to be a people holy (or set apart, consecrated) to the Lord (Deuteronomy 7:6), and not a mirror image of their surrounding culture.

- **How does this story challenge you to live differently?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What are some ways you can reflect the holiness of Christ in our culture today?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, point out item #8, which contains an informational chart regarding the Book of Judges, providing a list of characters that were used by God during this ongoing cycle of sin and deliverance.

SOURCES

1. "1954: 'Metal fatigue' caused Comet crashes," BBC News [online], [cited 1 Sept 2015]. Available from the Internet: news.bbc.co.uk.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPJoshSPR16)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



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GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject



08

SESSION EIGHT

The Wisdom of Deborah

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we will study the account of Deborah, a woman filled with wisdom, whom God raised up to judge the people of Israel. This was a woman who used her gifts in service to God, exhibited great faith in God's ability to save, and then gave glory for His mighty works. In Deborah, we see a picture of a faith-filled life that utilizes wisdom and courage in obedience to God.

SCRIPTURE

Judges 4:1-7,12-16; 5:1-11

THE POINT

God equips His people with gifts to be used for His glory and for their good.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

On the board or a large sheet of paper, write the following question: Do you trust God? Instruct students who answer “yes” to stand. State that the question is not as easy to answer as it may seem.

Read the following scenarios. Direct students to remain standing until you read a scenario in which their trust in God might be shaken.

- You just got your license yesterday and hit another car in the parking lot. No one saw it happen.
- You don't know the answers on an important test, but you can see the answers of the smart kid who sits beside you.
- Your teacher says the Bible is a work of fiction and challenges any Christian in the room to stand up.
- Everything seems fine between you and your boyfriend or girlfriend, but you've been sensing God telling you to break up.

• **What is the relationship between how much you trust God and how faithful you are to God?**

Point out that it's easy to say we trust God, but when life is hard it can be difficult to put our trust into practice. In the wake of current events such as riots, war, violence, and break-ups, life sometimes doesn't seem to make sense. It's hard to be faithful when everything around you screams “faith-less.”

No matter how faithless you have been, God promises to remain faithful to you. When you follow up your sin with mistrust or fear of His rejection and abandonment, you continue in faithlessness. When you trust His promises to restore you and to walk with you, you show yourself faithful again.

Option 2

We all face opposition, whether it's at school, in sports, or in some other competition. Share the following information: Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova played in tennis matches 80 times over 16 years, with Navratilova holding a 43-37 edge. “The beauty of our rivalry was not only we met so many times but the contrast. We were night and day, so different in every way and brought our own set of fans to the mix. It was drama. She was aggressive, I was the counter-puncher. She was muscular. I wasn't. She was from a communist country and I was an American, land of freedom. Just the way we looked. She was emotional. I was cool.” —Chris Evert

- **How was each player uniquely equipped to face the other?**
- **Who's the toughest opponent you've ever faced?**
- **In what ways do Christians, in particular, face opposition? How has God equipped us to remain faithful and stand against the attacks of the enemy?**

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God equips His people with gifts to be used for His glory and for their good.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Deborah:** prophetess and judge over Israel; used by God to rescue His people
- **Barak:** military leader; summoned by the prophetess Deborah to lead the Israelite army to victory over Canaan

PLOT

When important moments in history take place, they are almost always captured in some form or another. Either we report on them (journalism), recount the events as a story (history), or capture their significance in poetry or song. In the biblical story of Deborah, the author used two forms—narrative and poetry—in order to tell us the story of God once again rescuing His people. Deborah is a woman filled with wisdom, and she is used by God to rescue His people.

TIMELINE

DEBORAH

God gives personal gifts to be used for His glory and the good of others.

GIDEON

God gives strength to accomplish His will.

SAMSON

God uses broken leaders to accomplish His good purposes.

GOD RAISES UP LEADERS TO DELIVER HIS PEOPLE

Let's jump into a story that shows the beautiful way the people of God come together and use their gifts. A prophet, a warrior, and hundreds of others would all play a part in this rescue, and through their actions, God gets the glory.

And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD after Ehud died. And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim. Then the people of Israel cried out to the LORD for help, for he had 900 chariots of iron and he oppressed the people of Israel cruelly for twenty years. Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment. She sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali and said to him, "Has not the LORD, the God of Israel, commanded you, 'Go, gather your men at Mount Tabor, taking 10,000 from the people of Naphtali and the people of Zebulun. And I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the river Kishon with his chariots and his troops, and I will give him into your hand'?" (Judg. 4:1-7)

Again, the Israelites found themselves in the same Judges cycle. Unbelief is the root of the Israelites' idolatry. They did not believe that God could satisfy them, so they kept chasing after other gods by doing what was "evil in the sight of the LORD" (v. 1).

In response, the Lord allowed them to be seized by a general named Sisera. This was a man whose army assembled 900 chariots, ready to terrify any enemy that would rise up. He killed Israelite men and committed a number of other atrocities against the nation of Israel. But finally, after twenty years, the people cried out to God.

Against the backdrop of the Israelites' unbelief stood a few individuals who were willing to serve God and use their gifts for His glory. This passage introduces us to Deborah and Barak, servants of the Lord who operated out of a deep understanding of who God is.

Barak was Deborah's general, and he led the army of God's people. At first glance it might seem like Deborah was filled with faith and Barak with fear, but this was probably not the case. Barak, a mighty general, said he would fight Sisera's army if Deborah, the woman, would go with him. Deborah was representative of the

voice of God in this passage. Barak wanted to know that the word of God would be with him, just as Moses did in Exodus 33 when he begged God to be with the people of Israel.

So Barak demonstrated faith, and he obeyed by preparing an army of 10,000 men. Barak used the gifts God gave him to walk in faithfulness. He knew his role. He knew his part in the story was small and not for his own glory, but for the glory of God.

As we continue the story, we see how God's chosen leaders used their gifts in the face of incredible odds. Take a look at how the scene is described:

When Sisera was told that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, Sisera called out all his chariots, 900 chariots of iron, and all the men who were with him, from Harosheth-hagoyim to the river Kishon. And Deborah said to Barak, “Up! For this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hand. Does not the LORD go out before you?” So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with 10,000 men following him. And the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak by the edge of the sword. And Sisera got down from his chariot and fled away on foot. And Barak pursued the chariots and the army to Harosheth-hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not a man was left. (Judg. 4:12-16)

The day of war had arrived. The army of God was assembled on the top of Mount Tabor, and they could see the 900 chariots coming. You may think that the battle didn't seem too hard because the Israelites had 10,000 men while Sisera had only 900 chariots. But this was before the days of air war and atomic bombs. No one had ever seen an army of 900 chariots. Barak and his men would not be able to overpower Sisera and his chariots filled with men equipped for battle. They knew they were outmanned when it came to weapons (Judges 5:8). The odds were stacked against them—except for the all important fact that God was on their side.

The hinge of this story hangs on verse 14. “Does not the LORD go out before you?” This was the place of confidence and hope for the people of God: the Lord had gone before them. Deborah and Barak and the people of God had faith in the Lord's words. He said they would be victorious. Because He is a faithful God, their faith in His victory was secure.

Faith is what leads us to be courageous when facing impossible odds. Faith is demonstrated by our belief and obedience, our trusting in God and desire to obey Him in faith. Our faith is not rooted in our gifting, or found in our skills, or propped up by our ambitions. Our faith is in the word of God and in His unshakable character. As the people of God, we build our lives on the promises of God. No other foundation is stable.

- **How do you typically respond when you are facing what seem to be impossible odds?** (*p. 54, PSG*)

- **How does knowing that God is with you help you remain faithful to Him?** (p. 54, PSG)

GOD'S PEOPLE RESPOND TO HIS DELIVERANCE IN WORSHIP

Chapter 4 recounts the story of God's rescue. Now, in chapter 5, the author transcribes a beautiful piece of poetry—the song of God's rescue:

Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day: “That the leaders took the lead in Israel, that the people offered themselves willingly, bless the LORD! “Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes; to the LORD I will sing; I will make melody to the LORD, the God of Israel. “LORD, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the region of Edom, the earth trembled and the heavens dropped, yes, the clouds dropped water. The mountains quaked before the LORD, even Sinai before the LORD, the God of Israel. “In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were abandoned, and travelers kept to the byways. The villagers ceased in Israel; they ceased to be until I arose; I, Deborah, arose as a mother in Israel. When new gods were chosen, then war was in the gates. Was shield or spear to be seen among forty thousand in Israel? My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel who offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless the LORD. “Tell of it, you who ride on white donkeys, you who sit on rich carpets and you who walk by the way. To the sound of musicians at the watering places, there they repeat the righteous triumphs of the LORD, the righteous triumphs of his villagers in Israel. “Then down to the gates marched the people of the LORD. (Judg. 5:1-11)

Sometimes songs are the best way to communicate a story. Songs teach. When Americans attend a sporting event, they stand together and sing a story: “O say, can you see by the dawns early light?” They sing Francis Scott Key’s account of the War of 1812. It’s war history, and “The Star Spangled Banner” reminds Americans of who they are and their story as a nation. Similar to a national anthem, the song of Deborah and Barak was a victory song.

The focus of this song is not on the characters in the story, but on God as the rescuer. The leaders’ egos and the people’s accolades fade away in light of the glory of the one true God (4:14). It was the Lord who called Deborah to sit as a judge over His people. It was the Lord who gave Barak skills and leadership to assemble and train an army. It was the Lord who gave Sisera into the hands of a housewife (Jael, the woman who struck down the mighty general with a tent peg). It was the Lord who went out before them.

Why did the people sing? To praise the Lord and to remember His faithfulness. Deborah and Barak knew that people would be prone to forget the mighty works of God. That’s why she gave them a song of remembrance.

TIMELINE

RUTH AND BOAZ

A glimpse of God's love in the midst of dark times.

SAMUEL HEARS

Samuel hears from God.

Beginning Summer 2016

DEMAND FOR A KING

The people desire to be like the surrounding nations.

In the same way, we have been given songs throughout the Bible (Ex. 15, the Psalms, Rev. 5) that are meant to remind us of what God has done. In the singing of these songs, we are remembering and retelling what God has done on our behalf. In our singing we encourage and build up one another (Col. 3:16).

CHRIST CONNECTION

The story and the song of Deborah is our story; it's our song. We were captive to sin and we had no hope. Satan and his 900 chariots were stacked against us; we could not fight on our own. Yet the Lord stood in our place, fighting on our behalf, claiming victory over the enemy in an unlikely way—through a cross.

There is another story of God crushing the head of his enemy. In Genesis 3, part of the covenant God made with Eve is that her seed would crush the head of the serpent. Or to put it more clearly—Jesus would crush the head of Satan.

Today, we are the people of God because through Christ, God has crushed the head of the serpent. It's through this great rescue that we have been forgiven once and for all. We are like the Israelites, continually running after things we think will give us life. What does the world offer? The same lies the serpent offered in the garden: *You can be greater than God; you can be the hero.* But here we see there is only one hero. The hero of this story is God alone. The hero of the story of our rescue is Christ alone.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Work of the Holy Spirit in the Life of a Christian

The Spirit's work in the life of a Christian begins with salvation, bringing a person to faith in Christ, and is continued through the process of sanctification, helping that person become more like Christ throughout the course of his or her life. The Spirit empowers and indwells believers, intercedes on their behalf, and equips them with special gifts for service in God's kingdom. He is also our Comforter and Teacher, helping us to interpret and understand Scripture.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What are some ways we can discover the gifts God has given us? What happens when we choose not to use our gifts in service to God?** *One of the best ways to discover our gifts is by serving in different capacities within the church. By doing so, we are able to sift through our strengths and desires, as well as receive feedback from those around us. In addition, a good spiritual gift inventory can also be helpful.*
- **What happens when we have more faith in our gifts than in God's power?** *Faith in our gifts will ultimately disappoint. Our gifts should point us to God, helping us realize more and more that we are dependent upon Him in all things.*
- **What is the significance of Deborah telling Barak that "the Lord has gone before you"? How was this meant to encourage and challenge Barak?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **Why is it important to give God glory when He works through us? What happens when we take credit for what God has done?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

According to the story, Barak's army knew they were outmanned when it came to weapons (Judg. 5:8). Yet they stood there and trusted that God was going to do something. I wonder if, while they stood there, they retold one another the story of Exodus: "Remember what God did when he parted the Red Sea and our fathers walked on dry ground? Remember when our families came into the promised land with Joshua and the rivers were parted?" Knowing God's character and power gave many of them courage as they faced the tremendous odds against them.

- **How has God's past work in your life or in the life of someone you know given you courage and comfort during a difficult time?** *Answers to this will vary.*
- **How can you encourage someone you know with a story like this from the Bible?** *Answers to this question will vary, but you may want to give an example of how you might do this yourself, referencing another story of God doing a mighty work on behalf of His people.*



HEART

We saw in this story the song of Deborah and Barak. It is interesting that other religions aren't known for singing and writing hymns and praise songs. Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism are not marked by song the way Christianity is. As Christians, we can't seem to help but sing. Our faith sings. And here, after God gave His people the victory, Deborah and Barak broke into song, which is exactly what takes place in our own hearts when we reflect on the love of God in His victory over sin in our lives.

- **What are some Christian songs that cause you to reflect on God's love for us in Jesus, leading you to worship?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **How does this story help us think about the times we worship through song?** *Answers will vary, but include the fact that the essence of worship isn't about light shows and talented musicians, but about reflecting on what God has done and allowing that to move us, from the inside out, to praise Him.*



HANDS

In this story we have two very different people—a female judge and a frightened general—coming together to use their gifts. On a small scale this teaches us how the church today moves forward in unity, as one body with many parts. Some, like Deborah, lead with wisdom and counsel. Others volunteer to serve in the church. All of us have a role to play in the body of Christ (Rom. 12:4-5). When we walk in faith by using our gifts, we realize we are not the center of the story. We no longer pretend that we are worthy of glory, which frees us to truly serve God and others.

- **How do you currently use your giftedness to serve those within your church?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What are some areas where you can begin to start serving and using your gifts for God's kingdom?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPJoshSPR16)**
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09

SESSION NINE

The Assurance of Gideon

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we will study the story of Gideon—a weak and cowardly leader who nevertheless was used by God to deliver His people from the enemy. In the life of Gideon, we see how the God who sends us out to do His will is the same God who gives us strength to walk in obedience. God assures us of His love through His patience and kindness toward us, and He reveals His good and loving character by bringing victory through weakness.

SCRIPTURE

Judges 6:11-16,36-40; 7:16-22

THE POINT

God works through our weaknesses and empowers us to accomplish His will.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Share the following: A major earthquake struck San Francisco on October 17, 1989. The quake lasted 10-15 seconds and measured 6.9 on the Richter Scale, causing structural damage throughout the Bay Area. The total number of deaths attributed to this event was 63 with another 3,757 injured. The Cypress Street Viaduct collapsed on the Nimitz Freeway instantly crushing many commuters. The quake took place during pregame activities of the 1989 World Series between the San Francisco Giants and the Oakland Athletics.

How do you think it must have felt to be a part of an event like that? Has there ever been a natural disaster (earthquake, tornado, hurricane, flood, blizzard, etc.) in your area that caused similar devastation? If so, how did the disaster affect your view of God? How did it affect your faith?

There are times when our faith is really strong as well as times when it is not. Most Christians go through times when they struggle to have faith. (Consider sharing a personal story of a time when you struggled to have faith.)

- **Does placing your faith in God mean everything is always going to be great? Why not? Shouldn't it?**

Things will happen to challenge our faith and obedience to God. How we respond is what matters.

Option 2

On a whiteboard, write the following question: “What is your biggest fear?” As students enter the room, give them a sheet of paper with the instruction to anonymously write down one of their greatest fears. After they have had time to write something down, collect their responses.

Read aloud some of the responses without identifying any names. Ask the students how they would counsel a friend in dealing with these individual fears.

Point out that all of us have fears, some real and some imaginary. Either way, God wants us to learn to trust in His presence and power. Share a fear with which you have struggled in the past. Explain how that fear affected you. Describe how God walked with you through it.

- **On a scale of 1 (no trust at all) to 10 (complete trust), how well would you rate your trust in God's presence and power—especially when you are afraid?**
- **What are some specific situations you anticipate facing this week for which we can pray about?**

Distribute paper and a pencil to each student. Direct them to write their fears in pencil. Then, instruct them to use markers to write over their fears the words of Psalm 56:3-4. Encourage students to memorize the verse and recall it whenever they are struggling to trust in God's presence and power.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God works through our weaknesses and empowers us to accomplish His will.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Gideon:** called by God to deliver the Israelites from Midian; ruled Israel as a judge for 40 years

PLOT

As our story through the Book of Judges continues, we come to a judge many people have heard of—Gideon. For most people, the story of Gideon is about gaining assurance from God concerning His will for our lives. While there is some truth to that, the story of Gideon teaches us so much more—both about God’s character and our weakness.

TIMELINE

GIDEON

God gives strength to accomplish His will.

SAMSON

God uses broken leaders to accomplish His good purposes.

RUTH AND BOAZ

A glimpse of God's love in the midst of dark times.

GOD COMMISSIONS GIDEON

As we continue our journey through the story line of Scripture, we see how the Judges cycle of sin, oppression, and deliverance continued. In Judges 6, the Lord gave the people over to their enemies for a period of seven years. The situation was dire. God's people were forced to hide out in their own land, in dens they made for themselves in the mountains. Meanwhile, their enemies, the Midianites, overran their land, devoured their produce, and took their livestock.

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

This time, however, when God heard His people's cries, He chose not to send a judge at first, but a prophet. The people needed someone to deliver them, but God chose to send them someone to proclaim His Word to them. The prophet's words reminded the people of God's grace (Judges 6:8-9), His commands (v. 10a), and why they stood accused (v. 10b). God didn't send this prophet simply to slap their wrist and say, "I told you so." Instead, He gave them His Word as part of rescuing His people. He wanted them to learn the truth.

After God sent a prophet to deliver His message, He raised up an unlikely man and chose to make a mighty warrior out of him. Take a look at the calling of Gideon:

Now the angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor." And Gideon said to him, "Please, sir, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian." And the LORD turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?" And he said to him, "Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." And the LORD said to him, "But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man." (Judg. 6:11-16)

When God came to Gideon, he made an incredible promise to him: "The LORD is with you." Notice how this section begins with the angel of the Lord assuring Gideon of God's presence and ends with the same promise. Surprisingly, Gideon responded by questioning God's promise. If God was with them, then why had He allowed Midian to oppress them?

Like Gideon, we sometimes fail to see our sin and guilt, and so we rush to blame God for whatever we are going through. Sometimes, our difficult circumstances are brought about by our own sinfulness, not because God has been unfaithful. Gideon's perspective shows why God first sent the word of a prophet—He wanted His people to know they were at fault and needed deliverance.

Next, Gideon protested against God's commission on the basis of his inadequacy ("I am the least in my father's house!"). God's response ("I will be with you") was a reminder that the power of deliverance was not in Gideon, but in God's presence. The scene reminds us of how Moses responded when God commissioned Him. In both cases, the problem is one of perspective. Both Gideon and Moses first looked to themselves for their source of strength and acknowledged their deficiency. But God called them to turn their eyes to Him and His adequacy.

- **What are some common "Why" questions people ask God today?** (For example: Why would God let [this] happen? Why wasn't God there for me when I needed Him? Why does God allow war and suffering?) (*p. 60, PSG*)
- **What is something you've faced in the past that you didn't understand? How did it affect your faith?** (*p. 60, PSG*)

GOD ASSURES GIDEON OF HIS PRESENCE

Before we read the part of Gideon's story that he is most known for, we need to remember how God called Gideon to pull down the altar of Baal and cut down the Asherah poles (6:25-26). The Asherah referred to a divine goddess, and the sacred wooden poles were located at places where she was worshipped. Gideon was to set up an altar to the Lord and then sacrifice a bull, using the wood from the Asherah poles.

Why did God give such a command? Because two altars cannot coexist side by side. You cannot have an altar to God (v. 24) and an altar to Baal (v. 25)—they are mutually exclusive. God was coming to the rescue of His people, and because of the presence of the one true God, all false gods must flee.

Once the idols had been demolished and Gideon's task was clear, we see him questioning his faith, wondering if God's direction was true or not. Let's take a look:

Then Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said, behold, I am laying a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece alone, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said." And it was so. When he rose early next morning and squeezed the fleece, he wrung enough dew from the fleece to fill a bowl with water. Then Gideon said to God, "Let not your anger burn against me; let me speak just once more. Please let me test just once

more with the fleece. Please let it be dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground let there be dew.” And God did so that night; and it was dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground there was dew. (Judg. 6:36-40)

Ever heard someone say, “Why don’t you lay out a fleece and see what God says”? This is where that saying comes from. But it’s important to note that this text is not meant to be prescriptive—as if this is something we are all to follow. Gideon’s demand for a sign is one of his weaknesses, not one of his strengths.

The word Gideon used is “test,” a direct violation of Deuteronomy 6:16 where people are prohibited from testing God. Even Gideon seemed to understand that what he was doing was not what God desired, asking God not to be angry with him. Gideon had already heard from God and knew His will. (See Judg. 6:14-16,36.)

But before we pounce on Gideon so quickly to condemn him, we ought to recognize in this story a realistic picture of the doubt, fear, and lack of faith that we face whenever we struggle to follow something the Lord has clearly shown us. No, this story isn’t here to show us how to set out a fleece to test God. But neither is it here for us to bash Gideon’s lack of faith. Instead, the point of the story is to reveal God’s patience with us when we find it hard to trust Him. God is willing to stoop down and reassure us when we are afraid.

- **Are you sensing God calling you to do something, such as start a Bible study at your school or with a few friends? If so, in what ways has God shown patience with you? (p. 61, PSG)**

GOD GETS THE VICTORY OVER HIS ENEMIES

The victory of Israel over Midian is one of the most extraordinary battle accounts in the Old Testament. In Judges 7:1-8, God pared the army from 32,000 to 300 men. God insisted that His people see their cause as utterly hopeless, so that they would recognize that their deliverance could only be chalked up to God’s power and mercy. Along the way, God continued to reassure Gideon. And finally, Gideon worshipped God as a sign of his faith and trust in God to accomplish His will through him.

And he divided the 300 men into three companies and put trumpets into the hands of all of them and empty jars, with torches inside the jars. And he said to them, “Look at me, and do likewise. When I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then blow the trumpets also on every side of all the camp and shout, ‘For the LORD and for Gideon.’” So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, when they had just set the watch.

TIMELINE

SAMUEL HEARS
Samuel hears from God.

Beginning Summer 2016

DEMAND FOR A KING
The people desire to be like the surrounding nations.

SAUL'S DOWNFALL
Israel's first king fails to obey God.

And they blew the trumpets and smashed the jars that were in their hands. Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the jars. They held in their left hands the torches, and in their right hands the trumpets to blow. And they cried out, “A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!” Every man stood in his place around the camp, and all the army ran. They cried out and fled. When they blew the 300 trumpets, the LORD set every man’s sword against his comrade and against all the army. And the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the border of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath. (Judg. 7:16-22)

God accomplished a unique and grand victory solely through His strength and wisdom. Even the manner of victory showed that the battle belonged to the Lord and that He had accomplished the victory. The 300 men did not even attack; they pursued after the Midianites were fleeing.

CHRIST CONNECTION

The greatest example of God securing a victory on our behalf through weakness was through the cross of Jesus Christ. God stooped down, put on human flesh, and entered our broken world. The Jews expected a Messiah who would be a military ruler, but instead God came as a suffering servant to bear our transgressions and be crushed for our iniquities. (See Isa. 53.) He did all of this to defeat sin and death once and for all. “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).

Not only is the cross a reflection of God gaining the victory in weakness, but the message of the cross itself is a message that people who are relying on their own strength or intellect stumble over, as Paul states in 1 Corinthians 1:18: “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

Recognizing the strength that God displays through human weakness, we can be bold when we answer God’s call to service. We trust that the God who sends us out is the God who will sustain us on the journey. We don’t sign up for God’s mission because of the power we have to offer, but because of the presence God has promised.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Calling

The call to salvation happens in two ways: externally through the proclamation of the gospel, and internally through the Holy Spirit working in the heart of the person who hears. Both of these callings are essential, and both work together to bring someone to faith in Christ (2 Tim. 1:8-10).

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **When it comes to obeying God and following His will, what makes you feel inadequate or “not up to the task”?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **Why is it important for God to deliver us not only from trials on the outside, but also from idolatry on the inside?** *The Israelites had their external trials with the Midianites, but it was their internal heart trials with idolatry that led to their current situation. Salvation from their external trials wouldn't have changed the fact that they were still living in sin and disobedience. They needed to focus on the internal problem first, which would eventually deliver them from their external ones.*
- **When have you asked the Lord for some sort of sign to prove you were on the right track? What was the result?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **The mind-set of our world is that great things are accomplished by strong people. How does the story of Gideon turn that mind-set upside down? How does Gideon's story give hope to you in your weakness?** *As followers of Christ, we trust in Jesus' promise to empower us through His Spirit (Acts 1:8). No matter how inadequate we may feel, God sees us and says: “Mighty men and women of valor!” The strength to obey God and join Him and accomplish His will does not come from within us, but from God's empowering Spirit.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

Sometimes we desire to escape difficult circumstances when God desires for us to face them and learn from them. God's plan is not just to bring relief but also to bring about growth in His people. Holiness is more important than the absence of pain. If holiness truly becomes our greatest desire, then there is even profit from pain because we know God uses our trials to shape and equip us (James 1:2).

- **What are some lessons you have learned during difficult times?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **Why is the desire to grow in holiness better than a desire to have an easy life void of any hardships?** *This question isn't suggesting that we shouldn't desire or pursue lives that are stress-free. We should be grateful when things are going well, and we should thank God for His blessings. However, our desire to grow more like Christ every day should trump our desire for a life of ease, especially since God may use difficult times here and there to shape us into the image of Jesus.*



HEART

God loves us too much to allow rival idols to exist in our hearts. The most loving thing God can do for us is to expose and demolish our idols. He knows that true satisfaction is found when we lose our idols because only then can His presence be most felt. As the Psalmist declared: "Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully" (Psalm 24:3-4).

- **According to Psalm 24:3-4, what prevents someone from experiencing God's presence?** *In short, idols. Idols drive a wedge between one's fellowship with God.*
- **What idols have prevented you from experiencing closeness with God lately? Where are you seeking ultimate satisfaction this week?** *Answers to this question will vary.*



HANDS

God often assures His people by pointing them to His presence (Gen. 28:15; 46:4; Isa. 41:10). His company has always been our source of strength in the midst of the storms of life. Everything that Gideon needed was supplied when God promised to be with him, even though there were no further details about when or how or where or why. Only the what, or better, the Who. "I will be with you"—that is enough.

- **How does God's presence influence the way we fight sin in our lives?** *We don't defeat sin simply by trying harder but by relying on God's Spirit.*
- **How does God's presence influence the way we evangelize to others?** *We don't win someone to Christ by intellect and persuasive words but by relying on God to speak through us.*

▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPJoshSPR16)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject

10

SESSION TEN

The Deliverance of Samson

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we see God rescue the people of Israel from the Philistines, even when they didn't cry out for deliverance. God, in His extravagant mercy, chose a deliverer for them. In the life of Samson, we see God working through a broken and sinful man for the good of His people and the glory of His name.

SCRIPTURE

Judges 14:1-9; 16:4-5,15-30

THE POINT

God works even through the defeat of sinful leaders to bring about His plan.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

If you were to put together a winning team, what kind of people would you select? Perhaps you would look for the biggest, strongest, fastest people, giving you physical advantage over your opponents. Maybe you would choose the smartest and quickest thinkers to give you a mental upper hand. But when you look through Scripture at the team God uses in the unfolding of His plan, it seems like an unlikely collection of people.

All of the characters in Scripture are sinners in need of a Savior: Abraham the doubter, Jacob the deceiver, Moses the murderer, David the adulterer, and Rahab the prostitute. We could go person by person through the entire Bible and see this pattern repeated over and over through redemptive history. God doesn't shy away from working through imperfect people.

- **Why do you think the Bible's story line consistently highlights the flaws and failures of its heroes? Why is that significant for us to see?**

Option 2

Invite students to call out some great American leaders. (For example: Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson, Rosa Parks, George Washington Carver, Martin Luther King, Jr., Douglas McArthur, etc.) Why would these people be considered great leaders?

Distribute index cards with the instructions for students to write down a leader that hasn't been mentioned (either real or fictional), mentioning his or her good qualities as a leader, as well as one flaw or setback the leader has experienced. After they have had time to write down an answer, discuss their responses, followed by a brief discussion on the questions below.

- **When you choose a leader, what do you look for? Why?**
- **What do you think God looks for in a leader? Do you believe that God can use anyone to be a leader? Why or why not?**

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God works even through the defeat of sinful leaders to bring about His plan.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Samson:** last of the major judges over Israel, known more for his legendary physical strength than his commitment to God; despite his disobedience, was used by God to deliver His people

PLOT

We walk in the footsteps of our fathers. Israel's story is our story. Like them, we are prone to chase after empty, lifeless things. Even though God tells us how to find life and freedom, still we do what is right in our own eyes. None of the judges in these stories solved Israel's ultimate problem—the sin in their hearts. The judges were merely a shadow pointing to the final and ultimate judge, Jesus.

Let's look at one of the last of the judges: Samson. Maybe you've heard Samson portrayed as one part Jack Bauer (killing all the bad guys), one part James Bond (getting the girl), and one part the Hulk (you don't want to see him angry). But if all we see is a charming, angry, strong man saving the Israelites, we miss out on the heart of what God is doing in this story.

TIMELINE

SAMSON

God uses broken leaders to accomplish His good purposes.

RUTH AND BOAZ

A glimpse of God's love in the midst of dark times.

SAMUEL HEARS

Samuel hears from God.

SAMSON BREAKS HIS VOWS

Before Samson's birth, an angel came to his barren mother and told her she would conceive a son. God had chosen her child to be the one who would begin delivering His people from the Philistines. The angel also told her that she and the child should observe the Nazirite vow because of God's promise to work through her son. The Nazirite vow was a voluntary commitment that the people of Israel could enter into in order to pursue God. Nazirites dedicated themselves to God by keeping three vows:

1. Never defiling one's self by touching a dead body
2. Never drinking alcohol or eating fermented foods
3. Never cutting their hair

Unfortunately, as he grew up Samson wavered in his commitment to worship and love the God of his ancestors. Samson was a distracted judge. From women, to power, to having a good time, he consistently demonstrated a tendency to go astray and reject his special identity. Nevertheless, God chose to work through him. In the following passage, we see how he impulsively pursued a Philistine woman as his wife, and then how his impulses led him to break his vow to never touch a dead body.

Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines. Then he came up and told his father and mother, "I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines at Timnah. Now get her for me as my wife." But his father and mother said to him, "Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes." His father and mother did not know that it was from the LORD, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel. Then Samson went down with his father and mother to Timnah, and they came to the vineyards of Timnah. And behold, a young lion came toward him roaring. Then the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, and although he had nothing in his hand, he tore the lion in pieces as one tears a young goat. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done. Then he went down and talked with the woman, and she was right in Samson's eyes. After some days he returned to take her. And he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion, and behold, there was a swarm of bees in the body of the lion, and honey. He scraped it out into his hands and went on, eating as he went. And he came to his father and mother and gave some to them, and they ate. But he did not tell them that he had scraped the honey from the carcass of the lion. (Judg. 14:1-9)

A few miles from where Samson lived was the town of Timnah, where Samson found a Philistine woman and wanted to marry her. By pursuing this woman, Samson abandoned the clear teaching of God (Deut. 7:3) and said, “She is right in my eyes.” The problem with this relationship wasn’t because of racial or ethnic differences, but because of the difference in their faith. Samson wanted to marry outside the people of God. Samson was not “missionary dating” and trying to convert this girl; he just wanted what he wanted.

Isn’t this exactly what sin does to us? Sin appeals to our desires, and then beckons us to pursue the fulfillment of sinful desires rather than righteousness. The most dangerous lies of our time encourage us to do what seems right for us, or to follow our heart, or to find our own truth. “It is right in my eyes,” we say. But the Bible teaches that what matters isn’t what we think is right, but what God says is right. God’s word is final, and He determines right from wrong.

The story of Samson’s encounter with the lion reveals the level of his strength. Samson tore this lion like a sheet of paper! He was impulsive and powerful, but his strength came from God.

Once the lion was dead, to keep his vow Samson should have gone and ceremonially washed his hands, but he didn’t. He didn’t tell his parents what happened. Instead, on his way back home, he followed his impulses yet again and chose to eat honey out of the lion’s carcass. He shared it with his mom and dad (remember, his mother was still abiding by the Nazirite vow), so he even made his mother unclean with his actions.

Like Samson, compromise creeps into our hearts. The story of Samson is not given to us so that we can feel more or less righteous than him. Samson’s story is showing us the true nature of Israel’s heart at that time. His life is a microcosm of people walking in rebellion and lusting after things other than God. When we read this account, God is speaking to us, warning us as we look at these compromises, challenging us not to “do what is right in our own eyes.”

- **Like Samson, what are some areas of your life that you are consistently tempted to pursue your own desires and compromise in?** (p. 66, PSG)

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Guilt and Shame

Guilt refers to the objective status of someone being found guilty for a wrong committed, as well as the incurring of punishment that comes with it (Matt. 5:21-22; Jas. 2:10). Shame is the emotional pain that comes from sinful actions. Scripture teaches that human beings are guilty in an objective sense, and also feel the weight of shame in a subjective sense.

SAMSON SUFFERS DEFEAT AND CRIES OUT TO GOD FOR HELP

By the time we get to Judges 16, Samson has continued on a downward spiral of impulsiveness. At one point he tied 300 foxes together and lit their tails on fire to burn Philistine fields (15:4-5). He killed 1,000 Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey (15:15) in one of the greatest battle stories in the entire Bible. He did these things not to honor God, but to vindicate himself. Samson's successes led him to forget his identity. He trusted in his own strength instead of God who gave it to him.

After this he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, "Seduce him, and see where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to humble him. And we will each give you 1,100 pieces of silver." (Judg. 16:4-5)

Here we find God's chosen deliverer with yet another woman he should be nowhere near. Maybe you want to defend poor Samson and blame mean old Delilah for deceiving him, but we see that both these characters wanted the same thing: their own glory. Delilah wanted power and wealth, which the Philistine leaders would give her if she helped them. Samson was driven by his ego and the thrill of pursuing this woman.

So Delilah and Samson played a cat-and-mouse game. Three times she asked him where his strength came from and three times he lied to her. First he told her he would be powerless if she bound him with seven fresh strings from a bow. Delilah tried this and he broke free. (At this point, you might expect a "Define the Relationship" talk, including why she just tried to have Samson killed. But they just kept playing the games.) Delilah asked again, and he said he would be weak like any other man if he were tied up with new ropes. She tied him up with new ropes and called the Philistines to attack, and he fended them off. Again Delilah asked, and he said that if she weaved the seven braids of his head with a loom, he would be powerless. So Delilah tried that too, but with no success. But Samson eventually gives in.

(For a full reading of the account, see Judges 16:15-20)

Samson's story is a classic tragedy. As his life came to an end, Samson experienced true faith and repentance. He stopped trusting in his own strength and put his hope in God:

And the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes and brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles. And he ground at the mill in the prison. But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved. Now the lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to rejoice,

TIMELINE

Beginning Summer 2016

DEMAND FOR A KING

The people desire to be like the surrounding nations.

SAUL'S DOWNFALL

Israel's first king fails to obey God.

THE ANOINTING OF DAVID

The characteristics of a true king.

and they said, “Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand.” [...] Now the house was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof there were about 3,000 men and women, who looked on while Samson entertained. Then Samson called to the LORD and said, “O Lord GOD, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes.” And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. And Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines.” Then he bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life. (Judg. 16:21-23,27-30)

Here, we find strength in Samson’s weakness. It is through man’s brokenness that God puts His own glory on display. At the end of his life, Samson cried out to God for enough strength to defeat the enemies of God’s people who were present. God reached down into the brokenness of the judge who was chosen before his birth, and for the good of His people He answered Samson’s prayer. He rescued His people despite their total unbelief. Samson’s downfall was the result of his own disobedience, and yet God used his death to begin the deliverance of His people.

CHRIST CONNECTION

Centuries later, another baby would come after the announcement of an angel. The angel told a young girl named Mary that she would carry the deliverer of God’s people in her womb. She should call the boy Jesus. This time the deliverer would not need deliverance, but would bring deliverance to the whole world. Jesus’ death was the result of both His perfect obedience and our disobedience. God used His death to bring deliverance “once for all” for His people.

Jesus is greater than Samson. He is the Judge who would never break his word, the Judge who would never operate out of impulse or for self-gratification, but only do what the Father did. And in His death, many—including us—would become sons and daughters of God.

YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **We have learned in this story that once again the people were doing what was right in their own eyes. Why is it not okay to live this way? What are some consequences of living according to our own definition of right and wrong?**
Answers to this question will vary.
- **Samson's sin in this story is irrational. In what ways do our own sinful choices fail to make sense rationally?** *Sin often blinds us to reason and common sense, resulting in irrational decisions that bring devastating results.*
- **Like Samson, what successes in your life might lead you to put your trust in yourself rather than in God? How can we maintain a strong sense of dependence on God?** *Answers will vary, but one way to maintain our dependence on God is to remember that our talents and successes are gifts from God, and apart from Him we can do nothing good.*
- **It took humiliation and weakness to finally get Samson's attention. What are some circumstances God can use (or has used) to get our attention and draw us back to Him?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

If this was the only account of Samson we had in the Bible, then you might wonder if Samson actually believed in the Lord. But guess who shows up in Hebrews chapter 11? Samson. (See Heb. 11:32-34.) Along with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David is the name of Samson, who walked by faith in God. Though it took Samson years for God to strip him of his pride, eventually this giant of a man was clothed in God's mercy.

- **What hope does it give us to see Samson mentioned as a man of faith in Hebrews 11?** *One of the reasons it should give us hope is because Samson was still shown mercy even after persistent sin and disobedience in his life.*
- **What does Samson's story teach us about the patient love and mercy of God?** *Answers to this question will vary.*



HEART

While Samson had made a Nazirite vow with his mouth, the vow never made it into his heart. Perhaps as a boy he walked in the faith of his parents, but by the time he was an adult his true colors showed. Samson's flirtation with sin is a lesson for us. As Christians, we should not ask, "How far can I go?" or "How close can I get to the world without sinning?" The real question we should ask instead is: "How can we be holy as an expression of love for Jesus?"

- **Why shouldn't we live a "minimalist Christianity," which is essentially the mind-set that asks of us only the bare amount one can do and still be a Christian?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **Like Samson's actions reflecting his heart not being in the right place, what have your actions communicated about your heart recently?** *Answers to this question will vary.*



HANDS

In the story of Samson, God essentially says to Christians: "I love you. Before you were born, I chose you. I am your rescuer. The gifts I've given you I gave because I'm a good Father. So when you look at your gifts and your personality and the blessings in your life, let worship run its full course back to Me." Let's not trust in ourselves. Let's not ignore God and seek to go our own way. But instead, let us turn to Him.

- **How can you use the story of Samson when talking to a lost friend?** *One way would be to simply look at the life of Samson. Look at how God loved the womanizing, angry killer. Look at His mercy on display. God offers forgiveness to us all. His mercy is unfathomable.*
- **How does the story of Samson encourage you to use your God-given gifts for His glory and not your own?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, point out item #9, which contains an artistic sketch of Samson.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPJoshSPR16)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
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11

SESSION ELEVEN

Redemption in Ruth

SESSION SUMMARY

In the story of Ruth, we see a beautiful glimpse of God's love in the midst of dark times. Through Ruth's devotion to her mother-in-law, we see how God's love is constant and unyielding. Through Boaz's kindness to Ruth, we see how God's love is welcoming. And through the marriage of Boaz and Ruth, we see how God's love is expressed in redeeming us and providing for our needs. As people who have been redeemed by Christ, we are called to demonstrate the same kind of unyielding, welcoming, and redeeming love to others.

SCRIPTURE

Ruth 1:1-9,16-18; 2:1-3,8-12; 4:13-17

THE POINT

God shows steadfast love and undeserved kindness to those who trust in Him.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

- **Who is your best friend? Why is he or she your best friend?**

Share the following definition of *commitment*: a pledge or promise; obligation.

- **Why is commitment important in a friendship? What makes it hard to stay committed at times?**

Discuss the following information and quote about the friendship shared by J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis: C.S. Lewis, who had long rejected faith in any kind of god, took a walk one night with two of his closest friends and mentors, J. R. R. Tolkien and Hugh Dyson. As they walked through Oxford into the early morning hours, Tolkien and Dyson answered many of Lewis' lingering doubts and questions about Christianity. A few days later, Lewis acknowledged that Jesus Christ was his Savior.

“Friendship with Lewis compensates for much, and besides giving constant pleasure and comfort has done me much good from the contact with a man at once honest, brave, intellectual—a scholar, a poet, and a philosopher—and a lover, at least after a long pilgrimage, of Our Lord.” —J.R.R. Tolkien

- **In what ways were Tolkien and Dyson faithful friends to Lewis?**
- **Would you consider yourself a faithful friend? Why or why not?**

Option 2

As students arrive, invite them to find a partner and perform the following activity: Each pair is to sit on the floor with their backs to each other and elbows linked. When you say go, lead partners to slowly stand up, elbows still linked, as they lean against each other. Once students get the hang of this exercise, challenge them to see which pair can stand up and sit down the most times in one minute.

- **Could you have done this activity alone? Why not?**
- **How would it have affected your ability to complete the challenge if your partner didn't do his/her part?**

Point out that no matter what the situation, we need people in our lives that we can count on.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God shows steadfast love and undeserved kindness to those who trust in Him.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Naomi:** Ruth's mother-in-law; left Moab to return to her homeland, Bethlehem, after the deaths of her husband and two sons
- **Ruth:** Moabite woman who married one of Naomi's two sons; upon her husband's death, accompanied her mother-in-law back to Bethlehem
- **Boaz:** wealthy relative of Naomi's husband; blessed Ruth for her goodness to Naomi; later married Ruth

PLOT

The story of Ruth is like a breath of fresh air in the midst of the gloomy and turbulent times of the judges. The opening verse sets the stage: "In the days when the judges ruled." We've seen in the Book of Judges the cycle of God's people forgetting His goodness and mercy, turning away from Him, falling into miserable slavery as a consequence, and then being delivered by God's appointed leaders. We could sum up the lesson we learn from the Judges cycle in one sentence: God is faithful even when we are not.

Ruth continues this theme of God's faithfulness in dark times. Here, we see a picture of God's steadfast love and undeserved kindness to His people. In fact, love is a key theme of Ruth, and redemption is the heart of the story. (The words "redeem," "redeemer," and "redemption" occur 23 times in the book.) In this story, God shows His faithfulness through His redemptive work, demonstrated here in the love between Ruth and Boaz.

THE LOVE OF GOD IN THE LIVES OF NAOMI AND RUTH

Before we jump into the passages we will study today, it is important to understand a little background information. The story of Ruth contains a practice called “the family redeemer” or “kinsman redeemer.” It was a way of assuring a relative that, in case of a man’s death, their land would not remain permanently outside the family (Lev. 25:23-25). It was also a way of ensuring that a childless widow would be able to marry her husband’s brother in order to provide an heir and continue the family line (Deut. 25:5-6). Both aspects of being a “kinsman redeemer” show up in this story.

In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years, and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband. Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the LORD had visited his people and given them food. So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go, return each of you to her mother’s house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The LORD grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!” Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. (Ruth 1:1-9)

The story begins with tragedy. Naomi lost her husband and both her sons, leaving her childless with two daughters-in-law. In those days, a childless widow was in a precarious situation, lacking long-term financial support. She would be utterly dependent on the community to help her, but unfortunately she was in a foreign land. Naomi’s plight seemed hopeless. How would God rescue her from this misery?

Upon hearing that the famine in Judah was over, Naomi set out to return home. She urged her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, to turn away and stay in their land. Why? Because the custom in Israel was for a widow to marry her late

TIMELINE

RUTH AND BOAZ

A glimpse of God’s love in the midst of dark times.

SAMUEL HEARS

Samuel hears from God.

Beginning Summer 2016

DEMAND FOR A KING

The people desire to be like the surrounding nations.

husband's brother and thus continue the family line. (See Deut. 25:5-10.) Naomi had no more sons, and Ruth and Orpah's prospects were dim, so Naomi urged the women to turn back.

Surprisingly, Ruth decided to stay. While Orpah took the advice of Naomi, Ruth showed incredible faithfulness, even to the detriment of her own future. In Ruth, we see a picture of steadfast, unyielding, and loyal love—no matter the consequences.

But Ruth said, “Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.” And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more. (Ruth 1:16-18)

Ruth was committed to Naomi even beyond Naomi's life. She promised, “Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried” (v. 17). In other words, Ruth was promising that after Naomi died, she would not return to her homeland. Again, we see in Ruth a picture of faith.

Ruth was committed to Naomi's God. In verse 16 Ruth declared, “Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.” It is likely that Ruth had already become a follower of the God of Israel. (Her husband probably told her of the Lord.) But this declaration is striking because it comes right after Naomi had claimed God's hand had afflicted her. Despite the fact that Naomi's experience with God had led to bitterness (see v. 13), Ruth pledged her undying loyalty to this God!

This is the character of a godly woman who doesn't settle for the comforts of this world. Ruth rested in the unyielding and unfailing love of God for her, and so she demonstrated the same kind of unyielding love for others.

- **What sacrifices do you think Ruth had to make in order to stay with Naomi? How were her actions evidence of the unyielding love of God?** (p. 72, PSG)
- **What would you be willing to sacrifice to meet the physical needs of a friend? to meet their spiritual needs?** (p. 72, PSG)

THE LOVING PROVIDENCE OF GOD IN THE LIVES OF NAOMI AND RUTH

As the second chapter of the Book of Ruth opens, we begin to see how God is going to redeem and rescue Naomi and Ruth. God had already shown signs of His love for Naomi. He had lifted the famine in Judah and opened a way for Naomi to return home. He had given her Ruth to be with her and to care for her. Now, we see that God has been preserving a kinsman to Naomi's husband to carry on her line.

Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter." So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech. (Ruth 2:1-3)

Boaz was a prominent man of noble character, a man of God. In verse 4, we see him greet his workers with the phrase, "The LORD be with you!" Here was a man who saw God as part of his business life, not just his weekly worship. In Ruth, we see a woman who took the initiative to care for her mother-in-law, Naomi. She went into the fields and was willing to take on the humble task of gathering grain behind the harvesters.

In verse 3, the paths of Boaz and Ruth cross, as Ruth "happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz." This "happened" was more than just a coincidence. God was directing their steps in His providence to redeem His people.

Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Now, listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping, and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn." Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?" But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!" (Ruth 2:8-12)

When Boaz learned about Ruth gleaning in his fields, he addressed her and showed her unusual kindness. First, he provided food for Ruth. He told her to stay and glean in his fields. Ruth was a foreigner and Boaz had the right to kick her out, but instead he allowed her to reap all she desired. Second, he provided protection for Ruth. He had ordered the men not to touch her. Ruth was safe and secure under his protection. Third, he provided for her thirst. She had all the access she needed to the water.

The most important question in this book comes from Ruth: "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?" (v. 10) Boaz's answer, on the surface, sounded like he was doing so because Ruth had been so good to her mother-in-law, Naomi. But the real answer comes in verse 12 when Boaz said that she had come to take refuge under the wings of the God of Israel. In other words, "This kindness is

TIMELINE

SAUL'S DOWNFALL

Israel's first king fails to obey God.

THE ANOINTING OF DAVID

The characteristics of a true king.

DAVID AND JONATHAN

The gift of true friendship.

coming to you from the Lord, through me, because of your faith in God.” All of Ruth’s noble actions were a demonstration of her faith in the Lord. She’d chosen the Lord over any earthly comforts.

CHRIST CONNECTION

In the closing chapter of Ruth, we see Boaz meet with the man who is closest in kin to Naomi’s husband. The two of them discussed the need for Naomi’s property to be redeemed. They also discussed the need for Ruth to be cared for. Boaz spoke with the elders of the community and agreed to marry Ruth and thus continue on the family line. The book comes to an end this way:

So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.” Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. (Ruth 4:13-17)

Boaz was under no obligation to redeem Ruth, and yet he chose to do so no matter what it cost him personally. For thousands of years, Christians have seen in the integrity of Boaz a picture of Jesus and His love for us. He is our Redeemer, and He bought us with His blood.

The story of Ruth ends with the name of Elimelech continuing on through the offspring of Ruth and Boaz. Boaz was the kinsman redeemer who made this possible. Similarly, because of the redemption we have in Jesus, we know that our name will not be blotted out from the book of life (Rev. 3:5).

Ruth is a story of God’s redeeming love. He redeems all our pain, all our heartache, all our ups and downs for His purposes and our great joy. When you think God is furthest away from you, turned against you, or is absent, the truth is that He is laying the groundwork for something bigger than you could imagine.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

God Is Love

To say that God is love is to say that God is the essence of love, or that perfect love both resides and resonates within God Himself—one in three Persons. The imperfect love that human beings share between one another is a dim reflection of the perfect love that resides within God. The greatest act of love by God toward humans isn’t the giving of earthly goods, but the giving of Himself in Christ so that we might be reconciled to Him.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **The love Ruth displayed toward Naomi was steadfast. What are two or three ways you have seen steadfast love in action in your own relationships?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **Similar to the way Boaz demonstrated the loving welcome of God to a stranger, how can we, as the church, show this kind of love toward others?** *Answers might include things like: being hospitable to those who visit the church, serving at a local food bank, participating in a domestic or overseas missions trip, etc.*
- **What are some examples of difficult things in your life that God has "redeemed" and turned around for your good?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **How can the story of Ruth encourage your own faith and relationship with God?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

The story of Ruth not only reminds us of the redemption we have in Christ, but also shows how God redeems every part of our lives for His good purposes. In Ruth 4:17, we find a remarkable statement. The women give the son born to Boaz and Ruth a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” We would expect them to say a son has been born to Ruth or a son has been born to Boaz. But this is the turning point of the book. God took all the miseries that Naomi experienced and He turned it around for good.

- **How does the story of Ruth help you think differently about your struggles this week?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What does the story of Ruth communicate about God’s character? How can you rely on those same characteristics in your own daily struggles?** *Characteristics like faithfulness, goodness, steadfast love, grace, mercy, etc.*



HEART

As you compare Ruth to Naomi, you see the contrast between grumbling with God and a faith willing to risk everything. While Orpah turned back when the door was opened to her, Ruth clung to Naomi and proclaimed her utter loyalty. This is the way God loves us! Knowing that we are eternally secure in the love of Christ is the basis for intimacy with God. When we know that He will never leave us, we are free to come to Him openly with our sins, struggles, and fears, trusting that He understands and will never abandon us.

- **Would you consider God a committed friend? If not, what is preventing you from trusting Him completely?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What are some things you might sacrifice to show your commitment to God?** *Answers to this question will vary.*



HANDS

This story reminds us of God’s welcoming love for those who put their trust in Him. Faith in God moves us from being foreigners to family. When we put our faith in Jesus Christ, we inherit God as Father and other Christians as siblings. God makes no distinctions of race or nationalities. As followers of Christ, we who were once not part of the family of God should reach out to extend the love of Christ to all nationalities.

- **If you are a Christian, how does the reality that you are now an adopted child of God change the way you live from day to day?** *Our status and identity influences and informs the way we live. If we are rescued sinners brought into God’s family through faith in Christ, we will live in a way that reflects that.*
- **As an adopted child of God, why is it important to look for opportunities for racial reconciliation in our own life?** *Since God makes no distinction but instead adopts us all into His family, we too should be active in wanting to make our churches look more like the racial diversity that will be found in heaven.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, point out item #10, which contains a genealogy chart of Ruth and her connection with Jesus.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPJoshSPR16)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject



12

SESSION TWELVE

Samuel Hears from God

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session we come to the end of the period of the judges. During this tumultuous time, God spoke to a boy, Samuel, and gave him a message to receive, believe, and proclaim. In the story of Samuel, we see the proper response to hearing God's voice: receiving, believing, and proclaiming. Through the Spirit, we too are able to hear God speak through His Word today. As we respond in belief, we then proclaim the gospel of Christ to those around us.

SCRIPTURE

1 Samuel 3:1–4:1

THE POINT

God's people are called to hear, obey, and share God's Word with others.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

- **What would happen if you didn't talk with your friends, especially your best friend, for several days? weeks? months?**

Invite students to share about a time when a friend moved away or started going to a different school, and how not being able to spend as much time together affected the relationship. Point out that friends tend to grow apart when they stop spending time together.

- **Do you have a regular time alone with God? Why or why not?**

Distribute paper and pencils, then instruct students to write out their daily schedule. Discuss where students could fit time into this schedule to spend with God.

- **Why is it important to spend time with God every day?**

State that spending time with God helps us to grow closer to Him and hear Him when He speaks.

Option 2

Display instruction manuals for a variety of appliances, electronics, video games, smartphones, and so forth. Discuss the purpose of the instruction manuals. What are we supposed to do with these instructions? Why were they written? If you have ever put something together (something with lots of pieces and parts), did you read the instructions just once or did you continue to read them over and over to try to understand them?

Share that people who don't need instructions or manuals are the people who do those projects over and over.

- **How does this compare with handling God's Word?**

Emphasize that we don't fully obey God unless we follow our study of His Word with action based on what we learned.

- **What are some examples of things you have learned over the years that you now put into practice daily, weekly, or regularly? How many hours per week do you spend practicing an activity, studying, and doing homework?**

What might happen if you watched videos, listened to coaches, and read books on golf—but never hit a golf ball? State that we sometimes treat the Bible this way. The Bible is our book for life. It is vital that we not only study the Bible, but live it out and share what we learn with others.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God's people are called to hear, obey, and share God's Word with others.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Eli:** judge and high priest for Israel; accepted responsibility for the spiritual training of Samuel following a vow made by the boy's mother, although he failed to discipline his own sons
- **Samuel:** dedicated to the Lord before his birth; prophet and final judge of Israel

PLOT

As we have worked our way through this study of God's Word, God has spoken to us. Through the Judges cycle, He showed us His abundant mercy toward His people. With Deborah and Gideon, He reminded us that He is the God who fights on behalf of His people. With Samson, He showed us how He was the God who would claim victory over His enemies. In the Book of Ruth, He professed His loving kindness toward His people as their redeemer. In the events of each story, God has been speaking.

The Bible is God's voice. When we open the Word of God, we hear the words of God. Second Timothy 3:16 says that every word recorded in the Bible is inspired—breathed out by God. The words on each page come from His breath! God wants to be known, He wants to be near, and He wants to be worshiped. So, He speaks.

TIMELINE

SAMUEL HEARS
*Samuel hears
from God.*

Beginning Summer 2016

**DEMAND FOR
A KING**
*The people desire
to be like the
surrounding nations.*

**SAUL'S
DOWNFALL**
*Israel's first king fails
to obey God.*

SAMUEL HEARS

We begin this study with a little backstory on Samuel's life. This child was chosen before he was born to be a prophet to the nation of Israel. His mother named him Samuel (possibly meaning "requested from God") because she prayed for a baby and then dedicated him to the Lord. As soon as he was weaned, Hannah took Samuel to live at the temple and to be raised by Eli.

Eli was the priest in Israel, mediating between God and the people, and he had two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. These two men were nothing like their father in regard to knowing and worshiping God. (See 1 Sam. 2:12.) People would come to worship God with sacrifices, but the sons of Eli would interrupt their worship and plunder all of the offerings the people would bring. As Eli grew older, he lost control of his home. This is where our story picks up.

Now the young man Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision. At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. Then the LORD called Samuel, and he said, "Here I am!" and ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. And the LORD called again, "Samuel!" and Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the young man. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. And the LORD came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears." (1 Sam. 3:1-10)

Notice that the word of the Lord was rare. This means that God was not speaking regularly to His people. The people would not listen to God's voice. So now, without hearing the word of God, the people were in distress.

The word of the Lord was rare, but not for long. As our story continues, we see that here, God did not choose to speak to the cultural elite, a leader, or even a general, but instead to a boy.

Notice how it took three times for Samuel to realize that God was speaking to him. Verse 7 says that he didn't yet know the Lord personally. The word of the Lord

had not yet been revealed to him. But even though Samuel didn't know God, he was growing in his understanding. After this night, his life would never be the same.

Even Eli didn't seem to be expecting God to speak. It took both of them three times to realize that it was God calling in the night. Samuel was God's chosen instrument. Metaphorically, Eli's sight was growing dim, while Samuel's eyes were opening to the word of God.

Samuel's eventual response to God's voice is worth considering: "Speak, for your servant hears." He was ready to hear the word of the Lord. To ask God to speak to us through His Word is to offer up our lives in faithful listening.

- **Do you find yourself actively listening for God to speak through a sermon or Bible study you are attending? What are some things within our lives that might hinder us from listening?** (p. 78, PSG)

SAMUEL OBEYS

In the Book of Judges, we saw how God poured out judgment on His enemies. But here in 1 Samuel, we see the judgment of God poured out on His own priest. The good news that God speaks soon becomes bad news for Eli.

Then the LORD said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which the two ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. And I declare to him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever." (1 Sam. 3:11-14)

Eli's home was a wreck. His two sons, who were next in line to become priests, were blaspheming God, and Eli was completely passive in his leadership. Note how verse 13 says he did not stop them. As a result, God's judgment was going to be poured out on Eli's household.

Samuel was prepared to hear the word of God, even when it was very difficult. To sense how difficult this message was, let's try and put ourselves in Samuel's position. He had been unofficially "adopted" by Eli. Everything he knew about God came through the teaching of Eli. Now, Samuel, who loved Eli, was commissioned to pronounce judgment upon his house. Tough task for a young prophet!

We must be prepared to believe the Word of God in whatever it says. Whether the issues concern greed, the sanctity of human life, drunkenness, coveting, pride, or any kind of immorality, God never apologizes for speaking truth, and neither should we. But just as the heart of God is good and patient and kind, so should the tone of our message be expressed in love. Our task is to humbly love people with the truth, not stand in judgment over them.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Clarity of Scripture

Because God gave us His Word as authoritative in all matters related to life and faith, we believe His Word was written in a way that can be understood with the help of the Holy Spirit. Believing the Scriptures are clear does not mean that every part is equally easy to interpret; neither does it mean we will never make mistakes in our interpretation. It does mean that, with God's help, people are capable of understanding the biblical text for themselves as they employ correct methods of interpretation.

SAMUEL SHARES

There are two ways to approach the Word of God: to stand in judgment over it or to allow it to stand in authority over us. When we open the Bible, the posture of our hearts cannot be “I’ll let others decide if Your word is true or not.” No, our hearts must cry out, “It’s true!” Part of listening to God’s message and believing it is true is delivering it to others. This is what Samuel did with boldness after hearing God speak.

Samuel lay until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. But Eli called Samuel and said, “Samuel, my son.” And he said, “Here I am.” And Eli said, “What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also if you hide anything from me of all that he told you.” So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, “It is the LORD. Let him do what seems good to him.” And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the LORD. And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD. And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. (1 Sam. 3:15-4:1)

I can imagine Samuel lying in his bed unable to go back to sleep after spending time with God. With human ears, Samuel heard the whisper of the Lord. Eli probably didn’t sleep much either. Perhaps he expected to hear that God’s judgment was coming upon him and his household.

Eli called for Samuel the next morning to find out what the word of God was. Samuel told Eli everything. In this critical moment, Samuel walked in obedience to the word of the Lord. He chose to fear God rather than man. The ministry of Samuel for the rest of his days would be marked by this unwavering commitment to speak the truth to God’s people. His message continued to ring out through Israel. He grew to be a great prophet who would anoint both Saul and David as the first two kings of Israel.

TIMELINE

THE ANOINTING OF DAVID

The characteristics of a true king.

DAVID AND JONATHAN

The gift of true friendship.

THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

God reestablishes the covenant with David and his descendants.

Samuel was the first of a new kind of prophet, not one who would suddenly come in and out of the people's lives, but one who would live among the people and speak the word of God constantly. The Lord was with Samuel, and none of his words were meaningless. His words were effective because he walked by faith and in obedience before his Maker. Samuel walked with God and talked for God.

CHRIST CONNECTION

As Francis Schaeffer once said, "God is there, and He is not silent." Into the darkness of our lives, He speaks. Through the waves of our doubts, He speaks. From generation to generation, His Word is clear and His Word is to be received with joy and gladness.

Through the faithfulness of Samuel speaking God's word, we see the shadow of the greater Prophet who would come—Jesus. Into the quiet, God would speak. Jesus would literally become "God's Word with us." His Word would be among His people that we would know Him and He would be our God. Through Jesus, God would speak.

May it be true of us that we would be a people who are eager to receive the Word of God! May we be a people who believe whatever God says. May we be a people prepared to deliver God's message with empowered boldness.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Illumination of Scripture

Because of the vast difference between God's wisdom and ours, and because of humanity's sinful state, human beings are incapable, on our own, of fully grasping spiritual truth without being aided by the Holy Spirit through the process of illumination. When it comes to understanding the meaning of God's Word, Christians do not ultimately rely upon human reason in the process of interpretation, nor do we rely solely upon an institution or body of scholars. Instead, a Christian's ultimate reliance is upon the work of the Spirit of God who illuminates the Scriptures in the heart and mind (Matt. 13:13-15; Mark 8:18).

YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What kind of routine or activity helps you spend time in God's Word?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What are some ways we can prepare our hearts to receive God's Word?** *Some ways we can prepare our hearts might include having an active prayer life; being cautious about our entertainment decisions and recognizing that some forms of entertainment can pollute our hearts and minds and make us callous to the things of God; not staying up late on Saturday night and being exhausted on Sunday morning; etc.*
- **When have you been open to receiving the Word of God only to find yourself convicted rather than comforted? How did you respond to the challenge of God's Word?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **When speaking the truth of God's Word to others, why is it important to pay attention to our tone or the way we speak it?** *The truth of what we say and the manner in which we say it are both important. In today's climate, it is easy for our message to be disregarded or never heard simply because of the way we said it.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

Imagine if we had no Bible. Without God's Word, we would not know how the earth came to be or how evil entered our world. Without Scripture, we would not know what God is like or how we can live in relationship with Him. Without the Bible, we would not know right from wrong or why we exist in the first place. We know God because He has spoken to us. And yet, even today most of us have multiple copies of the Bible. The Word of God has never been more accessible, but are we hearing His voice?

- **What are some additional truths we know only because of the Bible?** *This question is intended to show that Scripture is essential for knowing truths about us and the world we live in.*
- **If one really believes the Bible to be God's Word to us, then why wouldn't he or she take the time to hear what it has to say?** *This question simply challenges our stated beliefs and our actual practices—what we say and what we do.*



HEART

Our sight is like Eli's, dim and fuzzy, and when we go to Scripture we need the Lord to prepare our hearts and adjust our eyes. Sometimes we feel like God is a million miles away, and we can't hear His voice. Even when we read the Bible, we may feel like we're reading a dusty old history book, not the living, breathing Word of God. If that is you, don't give up. Recognize that God has spoken to you. God's loudest word is the gospel. In it, He has spoken His love and acceptance over you in Jesus. Keep preparing your heart to hear from God.

- **Why do you think the psalmist prayed, "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you" (Ps. 119:11)? What is the connection between hiding God's Word in one's heart and not sinning?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What is the difference between merely "hearing" God's Word versus internalizing it?** *While hearing God's Word is necessary, it should go beyond that to actually living it out.*



HANDS

Like Samuel, we must also be prepared to share the truth of God's message to those around us. There are people in our lives who do not understand sin and their need for a Savior, which is why sharing the message of the gospel that we have been entrusted with is so important. However, it is encouraging to know that even though we are commissioned to share God's word with others, we are not called to share it in our own strength but by the empowering work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

- **How can you prepare to be a voice of truth in a culture that desperately needs it?** *One way to prepare now is to first know the truth, meaning spending time in Scripture.*
- **What are some practical ways you can be active in sharing the truth of God's Word with others this week?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, point out item #11, which contains a quote poster for this session.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPJoshSPR16)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



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GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject



13

SESSION THIRTEEN

Jesus Triumphs

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus' triumph over death came through His willingness to give up His heavenly status and humble Himself to death on the cross, and through His resurrection from the dead. As the One who humbled Himself for our salvation, Jesus is worthy of all praise and glory. In response, we are called to have the same attitude as Jesus and willingly give up our privileges and humbly obey Him.

SCRIPTURE

Philippians 2:5-11

THE POINT

Christians are called to follow Jesus' example of serving others in humility.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

When a rocket takes off to the moon, there is a lot to consider. Those who put fuel into the rocket must consider the rotation of the earth on its axis, the density of the air when the rocket travels through its various atmospheres, the weight of the vehicle with all its contents, and thousands of other variables.

The reason these considerations are so critical can be summed up in one word: trajectory. The weather, the amount of fuel, and the weight of the rocket all influence the trajectory of the rocket toward its objective. A small difference on the earth can cause the rocket to miss the moon by miles. Can you imagine the sickening feeling of looking out the window of your rocket and noticing that you have passed the moon?

While there is no single passage that summarizes the entire Bible, the story of Philippians 2 contains the trajectory of the Bible. This passage is poetic and fascinating, but it is also practical: the “trajectory” of humiliation to exaltation we see described of Christ in this passage is to be the trajectory of our lives, too. Getting this trajectory wrong, even if we are just slightly off in one area of our life, can cause us to miss the destination by miles.

- **What are some of the variables that can get us off track as followers of Christ?**
- **Is the path you are currently taking in life one that will lead you and others to Christ? If not, what adjustments do you need to make?**

Option 2

When things are going well, friendships can be a lot of fun. You laugh together and share fun experiences. But at other times you might be asked to make some sacrifices to help out a friend. How far would you be willing to go to help a friend who just got out of a relationship and needed a shoulder to cry on? whose car was wrecked and needs you to give him a ride to school and practice every day? whose dad is out of work and now he/she doesn't have the money to go to youth camp?

- **We often find joy in giving of ourselves to help the people we love. Would you be willing to do the same for a total stranger? Why or why not?**

Jesus made Himself like us in order to serve us. He didn't do it because He thought we were inferior or because He wanted to look good or because He needed community service hours for His high school diploma. He served because He loves us, and because that's just who He is. You and I are called to follow Jesus' example as we serve others.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

Christians are called to follow Jesus' example of serving others in humility.

CHARACTERS

- **Jesus Christ:** the second person of the Trinity
- **Paul:** an apostle of Christ and missionary to the Gentiles

PLOT

During this special Easter session, we are going to look at Paul's words in Philippians 2, which begins with the admonition to serve one another: "Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." (vv. 3-4). Almost every problem in relationships with family members, at school, or any other sphere of life would be solved if people would see other's needs as more important than their own. Paul goes on to explain this beautiful truth by showing us the ultimate illustration of Jesus.

JESUS HUMBLING HIMSELF BY BECOMING LIKE US

In a world where we usually measure status by what we can gain, God shows us how the ultimate triumph of Christ came through what He gave. In order for the plan of salvation to be accomplished, the Son of God had to step down into the world.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. (Phil. 2:5-7)

Here we see the apostle Paul encouraging us to make our attitudes like that of Christ. Though the Son of God had all the privileges that came from being one with His Father, He set those privileges aside in order to become human and rescue us. We shouldn't think that He emptied Himself of deity; we should instead see Him as taking on our humanity, submitting to a lowly status and position. God the Son came to serve us, and His service is our salvation.

Think about the most expensive car you can imagine. Now think about it being brand new, right off of the showroom floor. It has never been driven. You are the first person to sit inside of it, and as you do you are overwhelmed with the new car smell.

Now imagine that for your first trip in this car you decide to go off-road. There you are, running the brand new tires through thick mud and clay, flinging it on top of the fresh coat of paint. By the time you are done, the car is so covered in mud you can barely tell what the color is underneath.

This helps us to understand Paul's words here about Jesus being divine, taking on human form. Think about it: Your new car's status doesn't change just because you run it through some mud. It is still the car you bought, just with something added to it from the outside. We can think in a similar way when it comes to Jesus. Christ was God before He came to earth, He remained God on earth, and He is still God. The fact that He took on human form doesn't mean He ceased to be divine—it simply means that while He was on earth He did not take a hold of and utilize certain aspects of His divinity that were always His.

TIMELINE

Beginning Summer 2016

DEMAND FOR A KING

The people desire to be like the surrounding nations.

SAUL'S DOWNFALL

Israel's first king fails to obey God.

THE ANOINTING OF DAVID

The characteristics of a true king.

JESUS HUMBLLED HIMSELF BY DYING IN OUR PLACE

Jesus humbled Himself when He put on our humanity. But His humiliation continued when He died on the cross.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:8)

The purpose of crucifixion was not merely execution, but humiliation. Nails were driven through the person's hands and feet. No discretion. No respect for life. This was a public spectacle meant to horrify those who watched and humiliate the victims.

If you've ever been humiliated, you know the horrible feeling that comes with it. Perhaps it was a betrayal from someone you trusted. Someone you loved took advantage of you. Some hurts are so deep that people never recover.

What makes Jesus' humiliation stand out is that He willingly accepted this debasement. He trusted people, knowing they would betray Him. He loved the people who would torture Him. Humiliation is horrible, no matter how it happens, but it is staggering to our imagination to consider God *willingly being humiliated* in order to save us. What more evidence is there of Christ's love for us!

In this vivid scene, we see how the Creator of life, the One with all power, has not only relinquished this power to His creatures, but has given them the power to kill Him. Ultimate humiliation. How could anyone ever sink to lower humiliation than Jesus on the cross?

When the Son of God left the perfection of heaven, He did not consider the use of His privileges more important than the plan of God to save us through the ultimate act of humiliation on the cross. Again, no one has ever faced such humiliation. And yet, this humiliation is part of His triumph.

- **What did Jesus give up in order to save us?** (p. 85, PSG)
- **What does it look like today when someone gives up his or her own interests for the work of Christ?** (p. 85, PSG)

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

For further study note the remarkable connection between this passage and that of the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. The Messiah is exalted on high: "Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted" (52:13). The Messiah is humiliated: "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth" (53:7). The Messiah is again exalted: "Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors" (53:12).

JESUS IS EXALTED THROUGH HIS RESURRECTION

From ultimate humiliation, now comes ultimate exaltation! It's important to get this order right. We cannot understand how high Christ will be exalted until we understand how low He was humiliated.

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:9-11)

Notice the phrase, "Therefore God has highly exalted him." Paul wants us to see that God's motivation for the exaltation was Christ's humiliation. Christ went lower than any other; therefore, God will make sure that He goes higher than any other. Ultimate exaltation comes after ultimate humiliation.

The truth that God will exalt those who humble themselves comes up often in Scripture.

Invite students to use their Bible, a concordance, or even their smartphone to look up passages in Scripture where God's love and grace is shown to those who humble themselves before Him. Discuss what they find. Following are a few examples to get started: (p.85, PSG)

- **Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. (Jas. 4:10)**
- **Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you. (1 Pet. 5:6)**
- **Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. (Matt. 23:12)**

The scene in Philippians 2 is not just any humiliation. No, this is ultimate humiliation. This is not just any exaltation; it is ultimate exaltation. The exaltation of Christ is a real event that will happen. Christ was literally humiliated, and He will be literally exalted in a way that is even more public. (See Rev. 5 and 19.)

After His death, Christ was removed from the cross and laid in a borrowed tomb (John 19:41). This was the lowest point of Christ's humiliation. However, on the third day God the Father initiated the first stage of His exaltation by raising Him from the dead.

The resurrection is such a central part of the message of our faith that Paul considered it to be central to the gospel itself (1 Cor. 15:4). And that if this message is not true then our faith is loss (1 Cor. 15:1-19). And further, that His resurrection gives the confidence that we ourselves will one day be raised from the dead (1 Cor. 15:20-58).

And not only that, but there is an actual date on God's calendar in which everyone who ever lived will praise the exalted name of Christ. This is not just

TIMELINE

DAVID AND JONATHAN
The gift of true friendship.

THE DAVIDIC COVENANT
God reestablishes the covenant with David and his descendants.

exaltation, but super-exaltation. When someone who is dispassionate about Christ, or even hates Christ, speaks against Him, don't fear! The same voice that mocked Christ will cry out in confession of His lordship one day. The same people who fight against Christ will throw their bodies prostrate before Him, flat on their faces in awe and wonder at His majesty. In the end those who do not follow Christ will still recognize His glory, even as they face His judgment.

CHRIST CONNECTION

English speakers love superlatives: the greatest team of all time; the ultimate car; or the most extreme nacho chip ever packed in a cellophane bag. But with over-use comes loss of meaning—if everything is the greatest, then nothing is.

However, this passage of Scripture is definitive: No one was ever lower than Christ at one moment and no one will be more ultimately exalted than Christ for all time. Ultimate suffering leading to ultimate glory. Ultimate humiliation leading to ultimate exaltation. No one ever went lower. No one will ever be raised higher.

The same trajectory is evident in other stories of Scripture. Think of all the people who tried the opposite trajectory: they were low but tried to go high. The tragic examples of Adam, Saul, and Judas stand as steadfast witnesses to what happens when we exalt our desires above God. The examples of David, Hannah, and the apostle Paul stand as examples of how God exalts those who make themselves weak and trust Him.

The question you must ask yourself is: *Will I humble myself and serve others and then trust God to exalt me later? Am I willing to serve my family members, friends, and those around me like Christ. Am I am willing to descend into usefulness?* Most Christians are not afraid of heights, but a great many are afraid of depths.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Christ's Exaltation

Whereas the death of Christ was the ultimate example of His humiliation, the resurrection of Christ from the dead is the first and glorious example of Christ's exaltation. Christ was exalted when God raised Him from the dead, and Christ was exalted when He ascended to the Father's right hand. He will be exalted by all creation when He returns. All of these aspects work together to magnify the glory and worth of Christ, resulting in the praise of the glory of His grace in rescuing sinners.

YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What are some things you have given up for the good of someone else? What was the result of your sacrifice?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What does it look like when a church is filled with people who have the "attitude of Christ"? What does it look like when a church is filled with people who are unwilling to give up status in order to serve?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **How should knowing that exaltation comes after we humble ourselves help us trust and obey God in difficult circumstances?** *If we know that God gives grace to those who are humble (and opposes the prideful), then we can be confident through life's difficulties that He will bring us through if we remain humble before Him.*
- **How does Jesus' example of humility differ from the mind-set of our culture?** *Whereas Jesus instructs us to consider others as more important than ourselves, the culture around us often encourages us to build ourselves up no matter what, even if it means stepping on others in order to do so.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

Think for a minute about the irony in Jesus' crucifixion. Christ was being killed by His own creation. As He looked into the eyes of the soldier driving nails into His hands, He knew his name. He created this person. He knew that the soldier's deepest need was forgiveness. So as He was humbly raised into the air, a suspended spectacle for all to see, Jesus prayed for His executioners (Luke 23:34). Even though they were fulfilling God's plan while executing the Son (Acts 2:23), they had no idea what they were doing.

- **How does Jesus' humble response to others challenge you?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What are some areas in your life where you need to exercise humility?** *Relationships with parents, teachers, peers, etc.*



HEART

We often make the mistake of thinking that humility is merely found in our actions or in speaking about ourselves in a lowly way. While humility is certainly displayed in our behavior and actions, it is also true that we can possess false humility, which is simply another form of pride. Humility begins in the heart, and as Timothy Keller says, it "is not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself, it is thinking of myself less."¹ Given the human propensity toward pride, it is difficult for us to cultivate humble hearts apart from the grace of God and the active work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

- **What are some examples of false humility?** *One example is when someone compliments you on something and you try to deflect the compliment. A more humble response would be to accept the compliment, realizing within your heart that the reason for the compliment could only come as the result of God's grace in your life.*
- **What do you think about Keller's comment on humility? How does it change the way you think about humility?** *Answers to this question will vary.*



HANDS

In His humility, Christ came to serve and not be served (Mark 10:45), giving us a true model of what leadership looks like. This type of leadership is often called "servant leadership" and is different from the type of leadership that is domineering. It is the type of leadership all Christians are to display and exercise in the various leadership roles they have been given. By doing so, Christians not only serve those in their area of influence, but also make much of Christ in their service toward others.

- **Who in your life demonstrates servant leadership? Does their service to you and others make you grateful for their leadership in your life? Explain.** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **How can you begin to display servant leadership to those around you?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

SOURCES

1. Timothy Keller, *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*, (10Publishing, 2012).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPJoshSPR16)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject

STUDY PLAN

YEAR 1

Fall 2015

God the Creator (Genesis 1-11)
God the Covenant-Maker
(Genesis 12-50)

Winter 2016

God the Redeemer
(Exodus)
God the Lawgiver
(Exodus, Leviticus,
Deuteronomy)

Spring 2016

God the Savior
(Numbers, Joshua)
God the Judge (Judges,
Ruth, 1 Samuel)

Summer 2016

God the King (1-2 Samuel)
God All Wise (1 Kings, Job,
Ecclesiastes, Psalms, Proverbs)

YEAR 2

Fall 2016

God the Revealer
(1-2 Kings, Isaiah)
God the Pursuer (Major
and Minor Prophets,
1-2 Chronicles)

Winter 2017

God the Sustainer
(Daniel, Ezra)
God the Provider (Esther,
Nehemiah, Malachi)

Spring 2017

God the Son (Gospels)
God Among Us (Gospels)

Summer 2017

Jesus the Storyteller
(Synoptic Gospels)
Jesus the Miracle-Worker
(Gospels)

YEAR 3

Fall 2017

Jesus the Savior (Gospels)
Jesus the Risen King
(Gospels, Acts)

Winter 2018

The Spirit Who
Empowers (Acts)
The God Who Sends (Acts)

Spring 2018

The God Who Directs His
People (Epistles)
The God Who Changes
Us (Epistles)

Summer 2018

God's Prisoner (Acts, Epistles)
The God Who Makes All
Things New (Epistles,
Revelation)