

HIS STORY

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.

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

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 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.

The people forget about God's past work in their lives

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.

► **What assumptions did the Israelites make? What did their fear reveal about their trust in God? What did it cost them?**

► **How does fear sometimes keep you from following God's plan?**

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.*

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YOUR STORY

- ▶ **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?**
- ▶ **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?**
- ▶ **What does this story teach you about trusting God with your future?**
- ▶ **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?**

YOUR MISSION

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.**
- ▶ **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?**

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?**
- ▶ **Why do you think faith in God's future promises comes easier to those who memorize the promises of God recorded in Scripture?**

Hands

Because we have been fully represented before God by Jesus, we 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?**
- ▶ **What is a future promise from God found in Scripture you will share with someone this week?**

HIS STORY

The Israelites sin and are punished

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.

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.

► **When have you become impatient with God? Did your impatience cause you to grumble about what He had or had not done? Explain.**

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.

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.

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.*

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YOUR STORY

- ▶ In what ways can you see your own heart reflected in the attitude of the Israelites?
- ▶ What does the Israelites' punishment communicate about the seriousness of sin? How does this change the way we view sin in our own lives?
- ▶ What is the significance of God's command to the people to gaze at the snake? What truths were the people to consider?
- ▶ 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?

YOUR MISSION

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?
- ▶ Why is it so important to trust God for guidance instead of jumping in and doing things on our own?

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?
- ▶ How will seeing sin as a direct offense to God affect your approach to temptation and sin from now on?

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?
- ▶ 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?

HIS STORY

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 (Num. 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.

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?**
- ▶ **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.**

God’s people are to trust in His promises

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

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.

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.

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.*

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YOUR STORY

- ▶ **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?**
- ▶ **As a young leader following in Moses’ shoes, what fears do you think Joshua might have had? How would you have felt?**
- ▶ **How can you encourage others in your student ministry when it comes to stepping out in faith and obedience to God?**
- ▶ **Like Joshua, what are some “stones” in your own life that serve as reminders to God’s faithfulness?**

YOUR MISSION

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?**
- ▶ **What are some examples of things we can do to prepare our hearts?**

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?**
- ▶ **What are some things you have witnessed that have increased your own faith in God?**

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?**
- ▶ **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?**

HIS STORY

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.

God used a seemingly foolish battle plan to accomplish His purpose. As Paul says in the New Testament, "God has chosen what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen 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?**
- ▶ **Have you ever questioned something you sensed God leading you to do? If so, how did you respond?**

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.

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.

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.*

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YOUR STORY

- ▶ **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.**
- ▶ **How do you determine what you believe God is calling you to do? How do others play a role in that?**
- ▶ **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?**
- ▶ **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?**

YOUR MISSION

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”?**
- ▶ **How does faith “in action” give added credibility to expressing our faith “in words”?**

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?**
- ▶ **How has this session encouraged your own faith when it comes to trusting in the promises of God in Scripture?**

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?**
- ▶ **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?**

HIS STORY

Achan’s sin affects all of Israel

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.”

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.

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.

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.

- ▶ **What are some examples of poor decisions teenagers make that negatively impact their families? their church?**

- ▶ **Recall a time when your sin affected more than just yourself. How might considering the impact of your actions help you obey God and make better choices in the future?**

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.

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.

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.*

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YOUR STORY

- ▶ **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?**
- ▶ **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?**
- ▶ **What happens when we minimize the horrible consequences of our sin?**
- ▶ **Why does sin deserve death?**

YOUR MISSION

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 Babylon, 200 silver shekels, 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?**
- ▶ **What are some ways this story has challenged your understanding of personal sin?**

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 sees what is visible, but the Lord sees the heart” and Psalm 51:6 states that God desires “integrity in the inner self.”

- ▶ **What do you think is taking place in the human heart when someone decides to sin?**
- ▶ **When God looks at the inside of your heart, what does He see?**

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.”

- ▶ **What are some practical ways we can do battle with sin in our lives?**
- ▶ **If we become lazy in the fight against sin, how might that become a negative witness to non-believers in our lives?**

HIS STORY

Remembering God's work of grace leads to worship and obedience

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.

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.

- ▶ **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.**
- ▶ **In what ways are we still like the Israelites when it comes to worshipping God today?**
- ▶ **What idols do you need to get rid of in order to worship God in "sincerity and truth"?**

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.

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 be a slave of two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or be devoted to 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."

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.

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.*

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YOUR STORY

- ▶ **What would you say are characteristics of worship done “in sincerity and truth”? What would be the opposite?**
- ▶ **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?**
- ▶ **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?**
- ▶ **Why is it important that we see our obedience as a result of salvation and not as a way of earning salvation?**

YOUR MISSION

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?**
- ▶ **Why do you think some temptations and struggles are faced in every 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?**
- ▶ **Why does self-denial actually bring us more joy in the long run?**

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?**
- ▶ **What are some areas where you can live differently from the world this week?**

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

HIS STORY

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.

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.

► **Have you ever been unfaithful to God because you were more concerned about yourself than obeying Him? Explain.**

God judges the people

We've seen how God's people turned away and decided to worship the idols of the pagan nations around them. What will God do in response? 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.

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.

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.

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.

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).*

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YOUR STORY

- ▶ **What can we do to make sure we don't forget God's past work in our lives and in the lives of others?**
- ▶ **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?**
- ▶ **What are the dangers of deciding for ourselves what is right for me or right for you?**
- ▶ **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?**

YOUR MISSION

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 people get to decide for themselves what is true, right, and wrong. This notion is absurd 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 more, but 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?**
- ▶ **How does belief in God change the way we think about moral decisions in our lives?**

Heart

One of the interesting things about sin is that it doesn't stop people from worshipping. We don't see the Israelites stop worshipping altogether—they only stop worshipping God. 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?**
- ▶ **What are some ways to prevent our hearts from being redirected to these false idols?**

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?**
- ▶ **What are some ways you can reflect the holiness of Christ in our culture today?**

HIS STORY

God raises up leaders to deliver His people

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.

► **How do you typically respond when you are facing what seem to be impossible odds?**

► **How does knowing that God is with you help you remain faithful to Him?**

God's people respond to His deliverance in worship

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.

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.*

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YOUR STORY

- ▶ **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?**
- ▶ **What happens when we have more faith in our gifts than in God's power?**
- ▶ **What is the significance of Deborah telling Barak that "the Lord has gone before you"? How was this meant to encourage and challenge Barak?**
- ▶ **Why is it important to give God glory when He works through us? What happens when we take credit for what God has done?**

YOUR MISSION

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?**
- ▶ **How can you encourage someone you know with a story like this from the Bible?**

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?**
- ▶ **How does this story help us think about the times we worship through song?**

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?**
- ▶ **What are some areas where you can begin to start serving and using your gifts for God's kingdom?**

HIS STORY

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.

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?

- ▶ **What are some common “Why” questions people ask God today?**

- ▶ **What is something you’ve faced in the past that you didn’t understand? How did it affect your faith?**

God assures Gideon of His presence

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.

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.

- ▶ **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?**

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.

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).*

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YOUR STORY

- ▶ **When it comes to obeying God and following His will, what makes you feel inadequate or “not up to the task”?**
- ▶ **Why is it important for God to deliver us not only from trials on the outside, but also from idolatry on the inside?**
- ▶ **When have you asked the Lord for some sort of sign to prove you were on the right track? What was the result?**
- ▶ **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?**

YOUR MISSION

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?**
- ▶ **Why is the desire to grow in holiness better than a desire to have an easy life void of any hardships?**

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 may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not set his mind on what is false, and who has not sworn deceitfully” (Psalm 24:3-4).

- ▶ **According to Psalm 24:3-4, what prevents someone from experiencing God’s presence?**
- ▶ **What idols have prevented you from experiencing closeness with God lately? Where are you seeking ultimate satisfaction this week?**

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?**
- ▶ **How does God’s presence influence the way we evangelize to others?**

HIS STORY

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

► **Like Samson, what are some areas of your life that you are consistently tempted to pursue your own desires and compromise in?**

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.

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.

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.*

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YOUR STORY

- ▶ **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?**
- ▶ **Samson's sin in this story is irrational. In what ways do our own sinful choices fail to make sense rationally?**
- ▶ **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?**
- ▶ **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?**

YOUR MISSION

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?**
- ▶ **What does Samson's story teach us about the patient love and mercy of God?**

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 I 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?**
- ▶ **Like Samson's actions reflecting his heart not being in the right place, what have your actions communicated about your heart recently?**

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?**
- ▶ **How does the story of Samson encourage you to use your God-given gifts for His glory and not your own?**

HIS STORY

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.

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?

Ruth was committed to Naomi even beyond Naomi’s life. She promised, “Where you die, I will die, and there I will 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.

- ▶ **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?**
- ▶ **What would you be willing to sacrifice to meet the physical needs of a friend? to meet their spiritual needs?**

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.

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 are you so kind to notice me, although 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 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.

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.*

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YOUR STORY

- ▶ **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?**
- ▶ **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?**
- ▶ **What are some examples of difficult things in your life that God has “redeemed” and turned around for your good?**
- ▶ **How can the story of Ruth encourage your own faith and relationship with God?**

YOUR MISSION

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?**
- ▶ **What does the story of Ruth communicate about God’s character? How can you rely on those same characteristics in your own struggles?**

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 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?**
- ▶ **What are some things you might sacrifice to show your commitment to God?**

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, 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.

- ▶ **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?**
- ▶ **As an adopted child of God, why is it important to look for opportunities for racial reconciliation in our own life?**

HIS STORY

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.

► **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?**

Samuel obeys

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!

Samuel shares

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.

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.*

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).*

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YOUR STORY

- ▶ **What kind of routine or activity helps you spend time in God's Word?**
- ▶ **What are some ways we can prepare our hearts to receive God's Word?**
- ▶ **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?**
- ▶ **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?**

YOUR MISSION

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. We would not know what God is like or how we can live in relationship with Him. 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?**
- ▶ **If we really believe the Bible to be God's Word to us, then why wouldn't we take the time to hear what it has to say?**

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 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 treasured Your word in my heart so that I may not sin against You" (Ps. 119:11)? What is the connection between hiding God's Word in one's heart and not sinning?**
- ▶ **What is the difference between merely "hearing" God's Word versus internalizing it?**

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?**
- ▶ **What are some practical ways you can be active in sharing the truth of God's Word with others this week?**

HIS STORY

Jesus humbled 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.

Here [in Phil. 2] 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.

Jesus humbled 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.

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?**

► **What does it look like today when someone gives up his or her own interests for the work of Christ?**

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.

Notice the phrase, "For this reason God 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. Other examples might include:

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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.*

Leader Note: *Because some content from the Personal Study Guide will not be available on the One Sheet, make sure to adapt the session based on how you use the material with your group.*

YOUR STORY

- ▶ **What are some things you have given up for the good of someone else? What was the result of your sacrifice?**
- ▶ **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?**
- ▶ **How should knowing that exaltation comes after we humble ourselves help us trust and obey God in difficult circumstances?**
- ▶ **How does Jesus’ example of humility differ from the mind-set of our culture?**

YOUR MISSION

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?**
- ▶ **What are some areas in your life where you need to exercise humility?**

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?**
- ▶ **What do you think about Keller’s comment on humility? How does it change the way you think about humility?**

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.**
- ▶ **How can you begin to display servant leadership to those around you?**