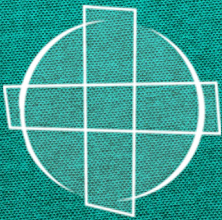


Donald J. Wills
Senior Pastor

APRIL
2018

TRANS*f***ORMED**2018
JUDGES 6:33-11
IN OUR FOCUS



ADULT CONNECT
CLASS CURRICULUM

The purpose of First Baptist Church of Fort Worth is to **introduce** people into a loving relationship with Jesus, **instruct** them in spiritual growth through God's Word, **inspire** them to serve for God's kingdom, and **incorporate** them in authentic worship to glorify God.

A Note From Our Pastor

Dear FBC family and friends,

The study of Judges constantly reminds us of the grace and longsuffering of God toward His people. Time and again, we read: "The people did evil in the sight of the Lord." Even during the times when they did not obey Him, the Lord sent a judge to deliver His people. Often, these judges did not do everything befitting of a godly leader and they took matters into their own hands. In all of this, however, God still faithfully delivered His people. It is a blessing to know that God looks beyond our faults as well as our failures and repeatedly shows us that He is faithful.

The layout of this curriculum begins with a 7-day approach for you to get the most from each lesson. We encourage each member to use the suggested 7-day approach for each one's own personal study and growth in your relationship with the Lord. In the process of study if you have any questions arise please feel free to contact your Bible study teacher or one of our staff members to assist you in your learning.

As we consider the events that unfold throughout the period of the judges, let us look beyond the events themselves and see the grace and longsuffering of God toward His people. As we walk life's road, we should celebrate the times when God has shown us mercy, grace, and patience. When we make mistakes and abandon God's plan for us, however, we must remember there is still hope and forgiveness. Therefore, let us remember 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

-Blessings
Pastor Don



Suggested Plan for Using this Bible Study Guide Effectively

Introduce

Day 1: Read and meditate on the Scripture, asking God to guide you throughout the week as you study His Word and allowing Him to speak to you through the Spirit. Read the **INTRODUCE** portion of the lesson commentary.

Instruct

Day 2: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and read the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary. Concentrate on memorizing the focal verse for that particular week.

Day 3: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and answer the focal questions in the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary.

Inspire

Day 4: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and begin thinking about tangible ways you can incorporate the principles you learned in your daily life. Read the **INSPIRE** portion of the lesson commentary.

Incorporate

Day 5: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and apply the theological principle that you learned from this week in a tangible way. Use the **INCORPORATE** portion of the lesson commentary to guide you.

Day 6: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and in the journal section describe how God allowed you to apply this passage in a real and tangible way this week.

Day 7: Review the Scripture and share with others in your Connect Class on Sunday morning at 9:30am. Be ready to share your experience about how God allowed you to apply the lesson for that week.

Contents

April Lesson Plan

3



April 1, 2018

Be Transformed from
Reliance on Self to God

[Judges 6:33-7:25](#)

19



April 8, 2018

Be Transformed from
Glorifying Self to the Lord

[Judges 8:1-35](#)

37

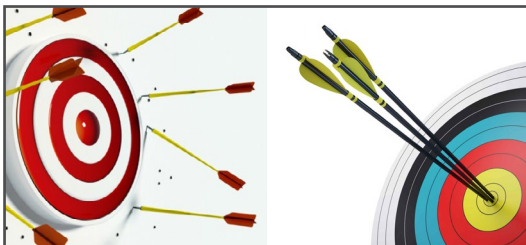


April 15, 2018

Be Transformed from
Self-centered to God-focused

[Judges 9:1-57](#)

55



April 22, 2018

Be Transformed from
Inconsistency to Consistency

[Judges 10:1-18](#)

71

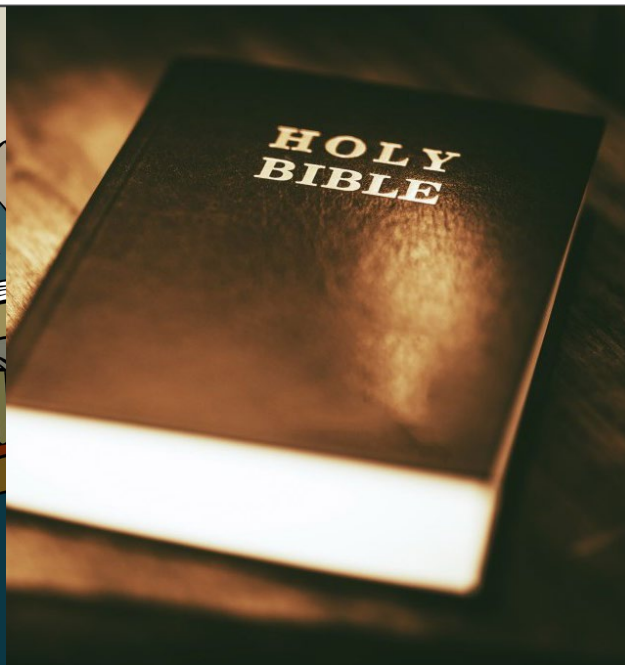


April 29, 2018

Be Transformed from
Impulsiveness to Sensibility

[Judges 11:1-40](#)

April 1, 2018



Be Transformed from Reliance on Self to God

Judges 6:33-7:25

Focal Verse:

"And the Lord said to Gideon, 'The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me', saying, 'My own hand has saved me.'" Judges 7:2

back to
Table of
Contents

Introduce

Today, one of the most-popular trends sweeping the country is off-the-grid living where people move to a remote area, such as Alaska or the mountainous regions in the upper Midwest, to become self-reliant and self-sufficient. Numerous television shows detail the exploits of



these individuals who try to use the natural resources from the land for fuel, food, and shelter. Although many of their homes do not use city water, sewage, or electricity, they still have many man-made, modern conveniences to help them along their journey—whether power tools hooked to a generator, solar panels to provide sustained electricity, new energy-efficient appliances, or new building techniques to protect against natural elements from storms to animals.

When we look at these individuals who attempt to live off the grid, we may admire their independence and spirit of adventure. Yet, inevitably as we watch these television shows, something almost universally goes wrong and the people trying to live an isolated life need the help of others—whether experienced carpenters, specialized workers, family, or friends. Very few of them can live an isolated life where they don't need help from someone outside of their small world. Even if they live off the grid, at some point they will need the expertise of a doctor or dentist to resolve a problem with which they cannot deal on their own. Despite having basic medical knowledge, there are some things in their lives which require

Introduce

expertise and advanced resources.

As believers, we cannot live independent lives isolated from the Lord, thinking that we can take care of everything on our own. In [Judges 6:33-7:25](#), God teaches Gideon a lesson in which he must learn to rely upon Him and not his own might. Even though we previously saw the Midianites and Amalekites described as numerous as locusts, God instructs Gideon to thin the troops down to **three-hundred** men so that Israel would know the Lord is their source of victory. Although we may be successful from time to time doing things on our own, we must learn to rely on the Lord who is the sole source of our strength and victory. Therefore, the ultimate victory in our lives belongs to Him and without Him we would be hopelessly lost in our sin without the possibility of eternal life. Consequently, we must allow Him to transform us in such a way that we rely upon Him rather than ourselves so that others may see His power displayed in us and they may be drawn into a relationship with Him.

Key
Question

Why should we rely upon God for everything in our lives rather than upon our own strength or might?

Judges 6:33-40

THE COMPULSION TO TEST THE PLAN:

With the **Midianites** and **Amalekites** having **crossed** the Jordan River to camp in the **Jezreel Valley**, **the Spirit of the Lord came upon** Gideon, motivating him to call the people to war (vv. 33-24). Blowing **the trumpet**, he first assembled his own kinsmen, **the Abiezrites**—the very people who had sought to kill him for destroying the idol of Baal ([Judges 6:25-32](#)). Then, he **sent messengers** through the rest of his tribe, **Manasseh**, and to those tribes affected by the terroristic nations occupying the **Jezreel Valley**; therefore, soldiers from **Asher, Zebulun**, and **Naphtali came** to join him in preparation for battle (v. 35). Even though Gideon had a life-changing divine encounter with the Lord who had called him to battle against the **Midianites** ([Judges 6:1-24](#)) and the **Spirit of the Lord** had come upon him, he still expressed doubt and concern, failing to surrender completely to the Lord.

Because doubt had once again crept into his mind, Gideon attempts to bargain with the Lord by asking for a sign that God would fulfill that which He had promised. Placing a **fleece of wool on the threshing floor**, Gideon asks God to allow **dew** only to form on **the wool** and to keep **all** the rest of **the ground dry** (v. 37). This way he would **know** that God would **save Israel**



Instruct

by his **hand** just as He had promised. Although God had clearly made His divine will known to him, Gideon still did not trust Him and wanted reassurance that he would be victorious. Patiently, God responded to His servant's request; when Gideon awoke the next morning, he found the ground completely **dry** and the **fleece** containing so much **dew** that he could squeeze from it a **bowl** full of water (v. 38).

Have you or someone that you know ever asked God for a sign? Why do we not need to ask God for signs because we have His written Word, the Bible?

Question
1

However, this still did not satisfy Gideon who continued to feel compelled to **test** God. Consequently, he pleads with God **not to be angry with** him and then proceeds to ask Him for yet another sign (v. 39). Despite Gideon's politeness and seeming respect, it still doesn't make it right that he continued to **test** God and ask for signs when he already knew with certainty what God had directed him to do. Gideon still viewed the situation from his own human perspective, so this time he asks the exact opposite of the previous sign—that God would allow **the ground** to be wet with **dew** and the **fleece** completely **dry**. Once again, God patiently obliges Gideon in his unbelief and fulfills his request (v. 40). Even though we may err at times as we mature in our faith, God patiently and lovingly forgives us and helps us to learn from our mistakes.

When is it a sin to ask God for a sign?

Question
2

In his continued testing of the Lord, Gideon had allowed his old, sinful habits to manifest themselves once again. In the New Testament, Paul urges believers to take off the “old man” and put on Christ; however, from time to time, we all still allow that “old man,” that is our fleshly and self-centered desires, to control our lives (see [Eph 4:20-24](#)). When God had initially called Gideon, he focused on what *he* could do to save or deliver Israel from these nations, rather than what the Lord would do. However, he then overcame his fears and doubt, smashing the idol of Baal just as the Lord had instructed him. Although he had seen God at work in his life, Gideon once again reverted to his old pattern of living and thinking; therefore, he wanted assurance that God would **save Israel by his** (i.e. **my**) **hand**. His focus turned from the Lord to his own personal perspective and what *he* could do to deliver Israel by *his own* power; therefore, he sinfully continued to test the Lord despite receiving clear directives and knowing His will with certainty.

What can we do to keep the “old man” from manifesting itself in our thoughts and actions?

Question
3

Seeking clarification or confirmation from the Lord concerning His will is not sinful in and of itself, and we ought to evaluate what we think God has told us to do in order to differentiate it from our own fleshly desires. However, when we question God in unbelief or distrust, it becomes a sinful action. For this



Instruct

reason, God has given us three ways in which we can know His will with certainty: 1) study the Bible, 2) pray with wisdom through the Spirit, and 3) seek spiritual guidance from mature believers. God will never ask us to do anything that contradicts His Word or conflicts with His holy character. Because we have the complete written Word of God, we have a way to differentiate God's will from our own desires, thereby confirming through Bible study, prayer, and mature believers the direction in which God would have us go.

Why should we confirm God's will in accordance with the Bible?

Question
4

Judges 7:1-8

THE NEED TO TRUST THE LORD:

Based on his testing of the Lord, Gideon had once again become self-reliant and trusted in what he could do on his own. As a result, God was about to teach him a lesson in relying upon Him alone. The 32,000 men whom Gideon had assembled **encamped** to the south of the **Midianites near the well of Harod** in preparation for battle (7:1). Speaking to him, God told Gideon that the men were **too many for** Him to utilize because they would **claim** victory and **glory** for themselves, saying their (i.e. **my**) **own hand had saved** them (i.e. **me**). Ironically, this was the same attitude that Gideon had developed when he tested the Lord, needing reassurance that God would **save Israel by** his (i.e. **my**) **hand**. So, God instructed Gideon to tell them **whoever is fearful and afraid** may leave and return home; 22,000 men accepted the offer and departed, leaving

only 10,000 (v. 3).

Still, the remaining 10,000 were too many, so God commanded Gideon to **bring them down to the water** where He would **test** them further (v. 4). God would reveal to him whom he should take and whom he should send home; therefore, Gideon was to separate the men in two groups:

1) those who used cupped hands to bring the **water** to their mouths and **lapped** it with their **tongues**

like dogs and 2) those who **got on their knees to drink** with their mouths directly from the stream

(v. 5). Only **three-hundred** cupped the **water** and brought it to their mouths and **lapped it**, but **the rest** of them **got down on their knees**



to drink directly from the stream (v. 6). Shockingly, God had Gideon dismiss the 9,700 men and retain only **three-hundred** for this military operation (v. 7). Then, the men whom God had dismissed **took** their things and returned home to their **tents in** the midst of **Israel** while the **three-hundred** remained in the hills overlooking the **valley** where the Midianites had camped in preparation for battle (v. 8).

Why should we rely on God rather than our own abilities or resources?

Question
5

With only **three-hundred** men, Israel could no longer rely upon her own power, but instead they must trust the Lord to deliver them from this mighty nation camped below them. As humans, we must resist the temptation to rely on our own strength and resources; we must trust

Instruct

the Lord and allow Him to work through us, so that we will receive the glory. Often, we trust in our own knowledge and wisdom as displayed in our education and degrees, but we need to trust in the One who knows all. We trust in our own network of family and friends for assistance and support, but we need to trust in the One who never fails. We trust in our own resources, but we must trust in the One with unlimited resources and potential. We trust in our own spirit of resolve and ability to fix our own problems, but instead we must trust in the great Counselor to guide us. Finally, we often trust in our own will-power and ability to transform, but we need to trust in the Redeemer who can cleanse and restore us thoroughly. As believers, therefore, we can't be like Gideon and his men trusting in their own power and resources, but we must trust wholly in the Lord.

In what times have you been self-reliant and failed to trust the Lord? How does it compare with a time that you relied upon the Lord and didn't trust in yourself?

Question
6

Judges 7:9-15

THE TREPIDATION CALMED BY THE LORD:

As a gracious God, the Lord offers additional reassurance and takes steps to calm Gideon's fears (trepidation). **That same night**, He instructs Gideon to **go** into the **camp** of the Midianites, reminding him that He has **delivered it into his hand** (v. 9). Knowing that Gideon would be afraid, God tells him to take **Purah** his **servant** and spy on the Midianites where he would overhear a conversation that would give him great boldness

(vv. 10-11). So, Gideon and **Purah** went as far as the outpost where the **armed** guards were stationed and heard the conversation about which God had told him. To put Gideon's fear into perspective before relating the conversation, the narrator reminds us that the **Midianites and Amalekites** encamped in the **valley** were **as numerous as locusts** and **their camels** as numerous as **the sand on the seashore** (v. 12). Humanly



speaking, Gideon had everything for which to be afraid, but with the Lord he had nothing of which to fear.

While spying at the **outpost**, Gideon overheard **a man** relating **a dream** which he had to a fellow soldier (v. 13). Oddly, **a loaf of barley bread** rolled into **the camp**, where it struck **a tent** causing it **to collapse**.

After hearing **the dream**, the fellow soldier then offers a shocking interpretation—especially for a Gentile who had no relationship with the Lord. He exclaims that this can be **nothing** else but **Gideon the son of Joash** from **Israel** who would destroy **the whole camp** because the Lord had **delivered** it to him (v. 14). Upon hearing this, Gideon not only worshiped the Lord immediately, but he was greatly encouraged and emboldened for war by having his fears and reservations alleviated (v. 15). No longer fearing the outcome, he **returned** to Israel's **camp** and assembled the men for battle, telling them to **arise** because **the Lord** has **delivered** the Midianites **into their hand**.

Instruct

Fortunately, we serve a patient God who takes time to help us mature and overcome obstacles—such as doubt—to fulfill His plan in our lives. We can depend upon the Lord; He may not always remove obstacles in our path, but He always equips and empowers us to overcome them. In fact, many times God allows obstacles to remain, so that we will learn to trust and rely upon Him. In addition, when we overcome obstacles in a way that we could not possibly do on our own, God is magnified and glorified because others are pointed to Him rather to our own strength and power. We cannot let our perceived lack of ability, talents, or resources stop us from obeying the Lord, but we must have the confidence that God will give us reassurance and confirm to us that to which He has called us. With God, all things are possible; therefore, we must surrender our lives to Him by allowing Him to work through our human weaknesses.

What obstacles has God helped you to overcome in your life?

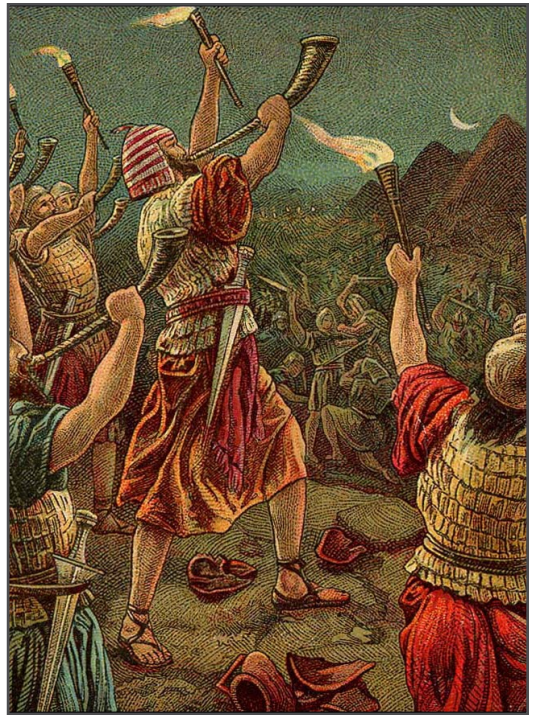
Question
7

Judges 7:16-25

TRUSTING THE LORD LEADS TO TRIUMPH:

With the confidence to wage war, Gideon **divided** the **three-hundred** men into **three companies**, giving every soldier **a trumpet** and **empty pitcher** with a **torch inside** (v. 16). It may seem strange to the modern ear that they had no weapons except these, but we must remember that God can do the impossible to defeat these two nations. Instructing the men, Gideon told them to watch and do exactly what he did as they get

to the outskirts of the camp (v. 17). When Gideon **blew the trumpet**, the rest of them were to **blow** theirs and shout “**the sword of the Lord and Gideon**” (v. 18). Although the Midianite soldier refers to the **sword of Gideon** earlier (v. 14), the emphasis is clearly upon the Lord who gives the victory. Without weapons, there would have been nothing Gideon could have done to stop the charge of the Midianites and Amalekites if they had decided to fight. Israel would have been humiliated in total defeat. However, God is the One fighting on their side and delivering His people without the use of any weapons in a display of His powerful might; therefore, all glory and honor is due only to the Lord; Gideon was only the human instrument God used to execute His plan.



In what way can we point others to God / Christ for the victories that He has brought about in our lives?

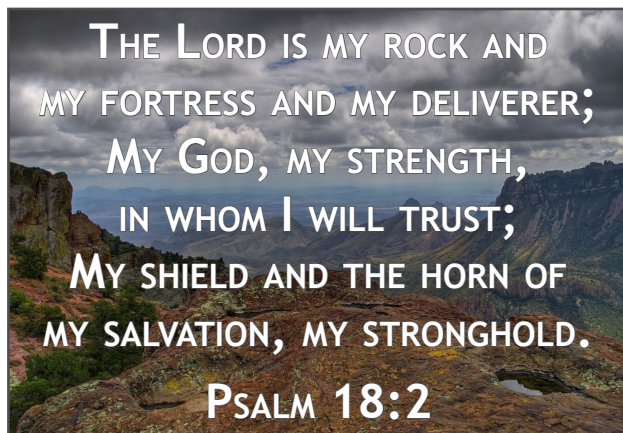
Question
8

Reaching **the outpost of the camp** about midnight (i.e. **the middle watch**) when the guards had just changed shifts, **the three companies blew** their **trumpets** and smashed their **pitchers**, creating such a racket that it startled the encamped soldiers (v. 19). Holding their **torches in their left hands**, they **blew** their **trumpets in their right hands** while shouting “**the sword of the Lord and Gideon**” (v. 20). Startled and confused, the

Instruct

Midianites and Amalekites momentarily froze in fear at the tremendous sound, but suddenly the **whole camp cried out** and began to flee (v. 21). In all the chaos, the **Midianites and Amalekites** began to stab one another with their own **swords** as they **fled** to **Beth Acacia** near the Jordan River in hopes of escaping to the east (v. 22).

As the foreign nations fled, the rest of the tribes of **Naphtali, Asher,** and **Manasseh pursued** them (v. 23) because Gideon had **sent**



messengers throughout the region, instructing them to assemble and fight the invaders **at the watering places** (v. 24). However, God did not instruct Gideon to send messengers to gather these troops; in fact, God was very adamant that He would

use the three-hundred men to defeat these nations so that He alone would receive the glory. The chapter concludes with Israel capturing and killing the **two princes** from these nations—**Oreb** they **killed at the rock** bearing his name and **Zeeb at the winepress** bearing his name on the east side of the Jordan River (v. 25). Just as He had promised, the Lord delivered these two nations completely into the hands of Israel and delivered them from the bondage which they had brought upon themselves by their sin.

Despite the victory, Gideon took matters into his own hands when he **sent messengers** to gather additional troops to pursue and conquer the fleeing Midianites and Amalekites. Once again, Gideon had acted on his

own which, in [chapter 8](#) which we will study next week, caused animosity and bitterness among the tribes because he had not followed God's instructions explicitly. For this reason, the men from Ephraim became angry that Gideon had not called them for battle (8:1-3). When we rely on our own wisdom rather than God's, it often causes problems—not only in our immediate lives, but also those around us. When God gives us directions, we need to follow them explicitly. When we do, God will be glorified and we will be victorious because He has fought on our behalf. Therefore, we must allow God to transform us from self-reliant to rely fully upon Him in everything that we do.

How does relying on our own strength and wisdom cause problems in our lives and to those around us?

Question
9

Inspire

If as humans we can't live independently from one another and need to rely upon each other, how much more do we need to rely upon the Lord? Our society has come to a place where people try to live isolated lives, whether that's moving to an isolated place or simply withdrawing from the community altogether. As a society, we have become self-absorbed and self-centered, thinking only about what affects us and what benefits us most. Gadgets like cell phones, computers, and the Internet which promise to unite us often drive us further apart and isolate us. Because we have an independent streak, we believe that we can do things on our own and resolve our own problems. We don't want to rely upon God for something that we think we can do ourselves and we don't want to

Inspire

attempt something for which we believe that we have no skill or resources, thereby greatly limiting the Lord.

On the contrary, we must rely upon God in all circumstances and situations. Nothing is too small or too great for God to be involved. After we confirm what God has called us to do, we must be willing to let go and let Him guide our steps so that He may receive the glory and recognition for working in and through us. Our natural tendency, however, may be like Gideon to look from the perspective of what we can humanly do while at the same time trying to order our own steps apart from seeking the directives of the Lord. When we trust God and allow Him to direct our paths, we will see Him do extraordinary feats which could only be possible through Him. Consequently, others will see God working in us and be drawn to Him for salvation and then for worshipful service. Therefore, we must be transformed from relying upon ourselves to relying upon the Lord, making sure that He receives all the glory and honor for what He has done and is continuing to do through us as He has called us to serve.

Incorporate

In what ways do we need to rely on God as a church in order that His Kingdom may grow and expand?

Incorporate

In what ways do we need to rely upon God for transformation in our lives?

From your own experience validated by the Bible, how can we help others to understand the importance of relying upon God?

April 8, 2018



Be Transformed from Glorifying Self to the Lord

Judges 8:1-35

Focal Verse:

"But Gideon said to them, 'I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you.'"

Judges 8:23

back to
Table of
Contents

Introduce

With the sun shining brightly, little wind, and perfect temperature, you thought it would be a splendid Sunday to worship the Lord—until you arrived in your Connect Class Bible study to see Mary Fuller-Pride sitting there. Although you realize in the Lord that you shouldn't be overly critical of people or try to avoid them, you just can't seem to overcome her arrogant and prideful spirit because of which she constantly boasts in her achievements and praises her own service. As soon as she opens her mouth, she begins talking about all the jobs *she* does in the church. Having recently finished Vacation Bible School, Mary began mentioning all the preparation *she* had done, giving everyone the impression that *she* had single-handedly made the event a success. If it hadn't been for her decorating, teaching, and leadership skills, VBS would have utterly failed—or so she declared. In fact, she proudly announced that seven children were saved under *her* ministry—not even giving the Lord praise for what He had done in the lives of the children and through the entire church which had served so faithfully.

During the Bible study, the lesson focused on the victory that the Lord had given Gideon over both the Midianites as recorded in Judges 8:1-35. Although he defeated the Midianites, smashed the idols in the land, punished those who worshiped them, and refused the offer to become king, Gideon's actions ultimately demonstrated his pride and



Introduce

self-glorification. Instead of faithfully worshiping and serving the Lord, Gideon become the center of attention when he demanded a tribute of golden earrings from the spoils of war which he melted and fashioned into an idol which led both his family and community astray. Verbally, unlike Mary Fuller-Pride, Gideon gave credit to the Lord for what He had done, but despite this he still led people astray by functioning as their king through his actions, leading them in idolatrous worship.

Without even thinking very hard, every one of us can probably identify by name a person like Mary Fuller-Pride who is arrogant and vainglorious or like Gideon who has false humility, but ultimately boasts in his own achievements and leads people astray in false worship. Before we pass judgment on either Gideon or the fictional character Mary Fuller-Pride, we must examine our own lives. If we are honest, at some point we have probably been like either Gideon or Mary—even though perhaps not as blatantly outspoken. As believers, however, we should never place the focus upon ourselves; it should always be upon Christ and what He has done for us on the cross and what He continues to do for us through His Spirit. Consequently, we must seek to be transformed from self-glorification to glorifying the Lord so that others may be pointed to Him and not led astray by our actions.

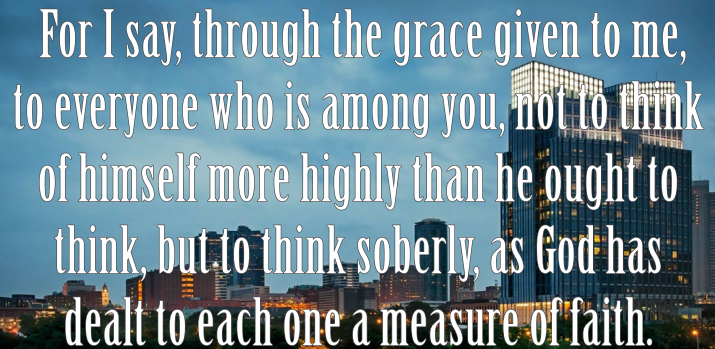
Key
Question

How can we make sure that we point others to Christ and not our own achievements or personalities?

Judges 8:1-3

THE CONTROVERSY BROUGHT BY THE COMMUNITY:

Despite the overwhelming victory that God had given Israel over the Midianites, chapter 8 begins negatively with the tribes arguing contentiously. **The men** from **Ephraim** began to dispute with Gideon angrily, asking **why** he had not **called** them into battle until the very end (v. 1). We can learn two principles from this loaded question. First, they omit any reference to the Lord or His activity in reducing the troops to three-hundred, instead attributing it to Gideon. Second, they ask this question with impure motives because they desired more glory for their own part in battle—once again, focusing on human achievements over the Lord. The very motivation that God had revealed to Gideon about Israel seeking glory only for herself rather than directing it to Him has now actually happened.



For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

Romans 12:3

In what ways do we sometimes seek glory and recognition for ourselves rather than directing it to the Lord?

Question
1

In a very diplomatic way, Gideon responds to the charges by downplaying the significance of his role. In fact, he describes his role as insignificant

Instruct

by appealing to the strength and majesty of their tribe over his. Just as he had done when the Lord called him as a deliverer by describing his “clan” as “the weakest in Manasseh,” he does so here by referring to the greatness of Ephraim’s harvest of **grapes** over that of **Abiezer** (his family). In other words, the people from **Ephraim** are eating high on the hog while those from **Abiezer** leftovers; for what reason then do they have to be jealous of him (v. 2)? Then, he points out that **God** had **delivered** the Midianites and their two commanders, **Oreb** and **Zeeb**, into their hands (v. 3). Although the focus temporarily shifts to God in Gideon’s response, it quickly returns to human-centered thought: in what greater feat could Ephraim have participated than to pursue the fleeing Midianite army and completely destroy it? Thus, he appeals to their own part in the fracas and elevates their role in completely defeating the Midianites, thereby causing **their anger toward him to subside**.

We must always seek to have a proper perspective through which we glorify God and not ourselves. Therefore, we should willingly do the tasks even if we consider them too small and insignificant for our abilities while at the same time we must also be willing to work behind the scenes and out of the spotlight so that others may be drawn into a relationship with Christ and magnify Him alone. As a result, we must intentionally glorify Christ with our lives because subconsciously our flesh often desires to be recognized and honored for what *we ourselves* have done. However, we must realize, just as Jesus both taught and lived, that we can do nothing on our own, except only that which the Father directs and empowers us to accomplish (see [John 5:19](#)). When we do things according to our own power and using our own resources, we

have the tendency to become puffed up with pride and seek recognition for what we have achieved. Instead, our focus ought to be on Christ so that others may be pointed to Him in what we say and do.

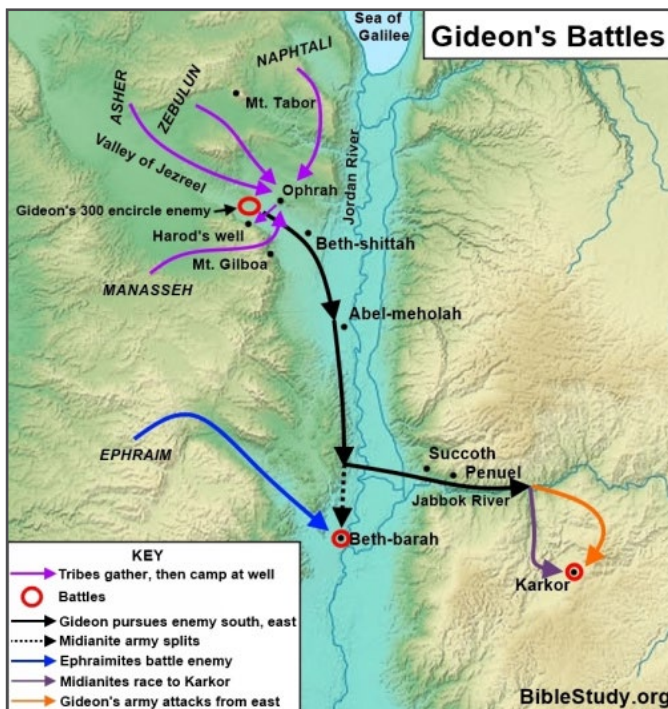
How can we effectively combat the temptation to become prideful?

Question
2

Judges 8:4-9

THE COMPLAINT BROUGHT BY THOSE INVOLVED:

After crossing the **Jordan River in pursuit** of the fleeing remnants of the Midianite army, Gideon and his three-hundred men had become **exhausted** and famished (v. 4). Thinking that his fellow countrymen would render aid to them, Gideon asked **the men at Succoth** to kindly feed his troops with **loaves of bread**, so that they could continue their **pursuit** of the enemy (v. 5). In a stunning display devoid of compassion and unity, they refused to offer any assistance. Instead, they mockingly ask for proof that the two highest



commanding officers (i.e. **kings**) in Midian had been captured and were no longer a threat to them (v. 6). Not only did the people at **Succoth** refuse to **give** the troops **bread**, but so did the people at **Penuel** as Gideon and the army continued to advance further east (v. 9). The people of Israel had

become so self-centered and self-absorbed that they had lost focus on the most important aspect—loving the Lord which in turn leads to love and grace offered to others.

When we allow pride to consume us, how does it affect unity in the church and the purpose to which we have been called?

Question
3

With the refusal of the residents in both **Succoth** and **Penuel** to provide food, Gideon flies into a terrible and violent rage against his fellow countrymen. Consequently, he threatens to beat (i.e. **tear the flesh**) those in **Succoth** with sticks containing **thorns** and **briers** and to those in **Penuel** he threatens to **return** and **tear down** their **tower** which protected them from attacks by the enemy (vv. 7, 9). Although he acknowledges **the Lord** in his response, the anger and hatred that Gideon has toward his fellow Israelites does not originate with God. He rightly claims that **the Lord** will **deliver** the commanders **Zebah** and **Zalmunna** into his hand, but his violent rage directed toward the uncooperative Israelites to settle a personal vendetta demonstrates another of his character flaws. God had not sent Gideon to judge and punish Israel; He sent him to pursue and annihilate the enemy. This does not excuse the uncooperative spirit of those in **Succoth** and **Penuel**, but it does serve to highlight the problem of Gideon seeing himself functioning independently and being emboldened to take matters into his own hands.

If we recall from last week, Gideon actually put himself in a position to take some of the credit and glory for the battle by having the men shout, “The sword of the Lord and Gideon” ([Judg 7:18, 20](#)). By this, he has now

become conceited and allowed his temper to dictate his response rather than follow the Lord's guidance in this tense situation. Perhaps as the commander, Gideon felt that he deserved the people to listen to him and provide for his troops, but at the very least he likely thought his fellow countrymen ought to show more gratitude for what he had done by extending hospitality to them. Whatever his reason, Gideon reacted violently and unforgivingly by abusing the very people whom God had sent him to deliver. Nonetheless, Gideon's personality contrasts with the Lord's character; God had acted graciously and patiently, offering His people forgiveness and deliverance even though they didn't deserve it—whereas Gideon had a critical and unloving spirit. When he failed to receive what he had asked, he immediately demanded retribution or punishment in the form of a violent rage against the people of both cities.



How does pride often cause anger in our lives when we focus on the actions of other people?

Question
4

Judges 8:10-21

THE CONFLICT CAUSED BY BITTERNESS:

Having become incensed with the people's calloused response, Gideon left and pressed eastward in pursuit of **Zebah** and **Zalmuuna** along with **15,000** Midianite soldiers still with them (v. 10). At this point, the narrator notes the extent that the Lord had defeated the mighty Midianite army

Instruct

with only three-hundred men by revealing that **120,000 men had** already **fallen** in the confusion when they began to slaughter themselves in the Jezreel Valley in the initial attack ([Judg 7:22](#)). Eventually, Gideon and his three-hundred men caught the remaining Midianites near **Nobah and Jogbehah** and **attacked** them in their **camp** while they **felt secure** (v. 11). During this battle, however, the commanding officers **Zebah and Zalmuuna** escaped, but were eventually caught and **the whole army routed** (v. 12). The Lord, not Gideon, worked miraculously through these three-hundred men, defeated the Midianites completely, and delivered Israel from oppression. Throughout the rest of the story, therefore, we must remember that the Lord is the One who showed mercy and patience and the One who gave Israel the victory over the Midianites—regardless of what Gideon may do or say to elevate his own status and role and to enact vengeance upon his “enemies.”

In-Depth Information



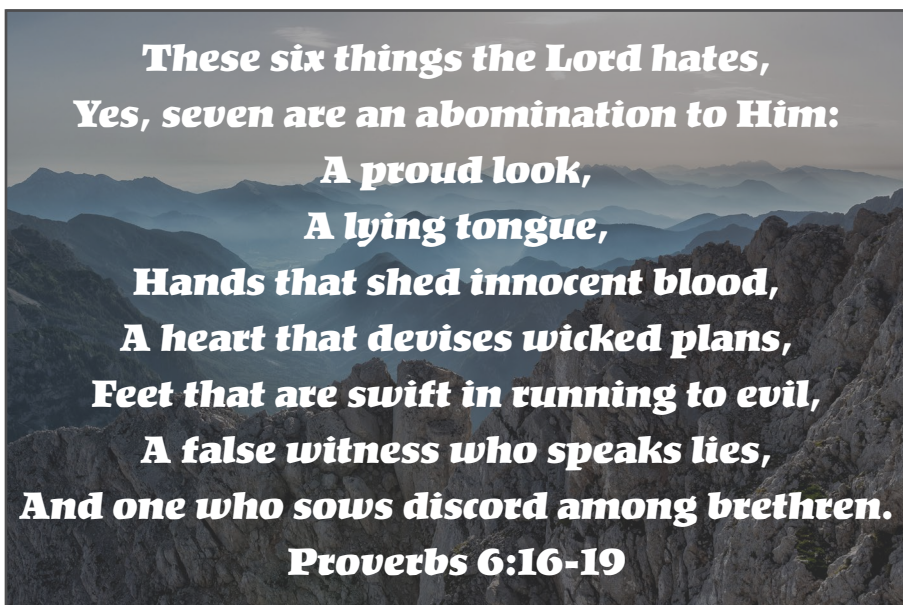
*The Hebrew text identifies Zebah and Zalmuuna as **kings** to distinguish them from Oreb and Zeeb. The word **kings** in this context doesn't refer to a royal official, but to senior commanding officers. In our modern understanding, they would be similar to five-star generals—the very top of the command chain.*

Returning from **the battle**, Gideon sought to settle the score with the people of **Succoth** because they had refused to help his men; therefore, he **caught a young man** from the city and forced him to reveal **the names** of the **seventy-seven leaders**, so he could enact his vengeance upon them

(vv. 13-14). Subsequently, he brought **Zeba and Zalmuuna** as evidence of the victory over the Midianite army and began to taunt the men of Succoth. Having brought the pair back from the battlefield, he sarcastically reminded them of what they had said by asking them if now they would **give bread** to his **weary men** (v. 15). After taunting them, he beat them severely with **thorns and briers** just as he said that he would do (v. 16). Then, he proceeded to **Penuel** where he not only **tore down** their **tower**, but he also **killed the men of** that **city** (v. 17). Certainly,

errant people need correction, but God never expects us to punish others out of anger, bitterness, or a sense of pride in our own authority to do so. Instead, we

are to correct others lovingly through verbal admonition and by living consistently with God's Word in our actions. Gideon did neither of these things; here he actually established himself as the authority and took matters in his own hand by enacting revenge.



Why should we never correct or attempt to punish someone out of anger?

Question
5

Instruct

After enacting vengeance upon **Succoth** and **Penuel**, Gideon began to interrogate his two prisoners of war by asking them **what kind of men** that they **had killed in Tabor** (v. 18). In an attempt at flattery, they replied that they resembled Gideon in that they had the appearance of a royal family (i.e. **son of a king**). **Then**, Gideon revealed that **they were his brothers**, so once again he took justice into his own hand and sentenced the two commanders to death (v. 19). However, this time he attempted to coerce his **firstborn son, Jether**, to **kill** them, but he refused—being **afraid** because of his young age (v. 20). Mocking him, Zebah and Zalmuuna told Gideon to **kill** them himself—if he is indeed a **man** with enough **strength** to do it. Gideon **arose** and **killed** them, taking their **crescent** and **ornaments** which symbolized their rank and authority as trophies of his conquest.

Gideon had not only set a bad example through his actions which displayed unrestrained anger and malice, but now he is also teaching his son to disregard the directives of the Lord and take matters into his own hands. We must exercise caution in how we teach our children, whether in what we ask them to do or by how we live; we must always seek to teach them to honor God and follow His boundaries for their lives so that they may have an abundant life which pleases the Lord. Too many times, however, we teach our children bad examples because what we say conflicts with what we do; in essence, we say, “Do as I say, not as I do.” In Gideon’s case, however, his actions and words were consistent, but they contradicted what the Word of the Lord had specified about treating one’s fellow countrymen. Therefore, as parents we must be careful to model the Word of the Lord in our lives and live consistently with its

teachings so that we can raise our children to respect the Lord and follow His directives.

As parents why must we be both careful and conscious of the lessons we teach our children whether verbally or by example?

Question
7

Judges 8:22-32

THE CONFUSION OF WORSHIP:

With the attention directed toward Gideon and his exploits, the men of Israel invited him to **rule over** them because **he** had **delivered** them from **Midian** (v. 22)—the people saw Gideon as their human deliverer rather than the Lord as their divine One. Briefly, Gideon tried to correct their thinking by refusing to **rule over** them and pointing them to the Lord who should **rule** (v. 23). Yet, even though Gideon refuses the kingship for him and his family, he still functions as a king by demanding a tribute of **golden earrings** from each of them that they had taken off the defeated Midianite soldiers after they had been slain in battle (v. 24).



Not only did they **gladly give** Gideon these forty-three pounds of **golden earrings** (i.e. **1,700 shekles**), but they also gave him expensive **purple robes** from the defeated commanders Zebah and Zalmuuna as well as the necklaces adorning their **camels** (vv. 25-26). In essence, Gideon was placed in a position of authority in the manner of a king even though he had refused it publicly and verbally; not only did the men regard his as

Instruct

their king, but Gideon also began to see himself in that capacity as indicated by his actions.

How does Gideon take the focus off the Lord and place it upon himself? In what ways does Gideon function as a “king” or “ruler” even though he refuses the position?

Question
8

As a leader, Gideon melted the **golden earrings** and fashioned them into an **ephod**, placing it in his hometown of **Ophrah** (v. 27). The **ephod** usually refers to a special breastplate the priest wears, but here in this context it functions more as an idol since Gideon **sets it up** in his hometown and the people worship it falsely (i.e. **played the harlot**). By demanding a tribute from the people and causing them to focus upon him and not the Lord, Gideon led both his family and Israel astray. Although the Lord had used Gideon to defeat the **Midianites** permanently and usher in **forty years of peace**, the people continued to reject the Lord and serve idols (v. 28). Despite following the Lord’s commands, Gideon did not lead the people into a relationship where they worshiped God alone. Even though God delivered the people through Gideon, they were not delivered from their idolatry and sinfulness because of the example that he had set for them. Nevertheless, Gideon settled back among his kinsfolk and took **many wives** who bore him **seventy sons** (vv. 29-30). He died at a **good age** and **was buried** in his **father’s tomb** amongst his relatives—the **Abiezrites** (v. 32).

Whether we see ourselves as leaders or not, every one of us has someone who watches our lives and mimics our actions. For some it may be a

brother or sister, for others it may be a child or grandchild, for others it may be a friend or close associate, and still for others it may be a co-worker or even someone within the church. Someone is always watching us in what we do and what we say; therefore, even if we reject the title “leader,” the reality is that we still have followers trying to emulate our examples. We should not follow Gideon’s example; despite trying to point people to the Lord, his actions led people astray. He glorified himself and silently led people away from the Lord by his idolatrous example. For all the good that Gideon had done, the good was overshadowed by the idolatrous example that he set which drove future generations further from the Lord. Instead, we must consciously live in such a way that minimizes people’s focus on us and glorifies the Lord by living exemplary and righteous lives that contrast with the world around us by being transformed in our minds and actions and conformed to His image ([Rom 12:1-2](#); [John 3:30](#)).



Why is it important that we all see ourselves as examples to others?

Question
9

Judges 8:33-35

THE CORRUPTION OF THE PEOPLE:

Just as this chapter began on a negative note with bickering and bitterness, it ends on a negative note as well. After Gideon’s death, **the children of Israel** continued to worship false gods and once **again** turned to the service of Baal—this time **Baal-Berith** (v. 33). The word **berith** in Hebrew is

translated into English as “covenant”; worshiping “the covenant of Baal,” therefore, becomes especially heinous because it depicts exactly how they have rejected the covenant with the Lord and turned to serve the false gods of the nations around them. Consequently, in their corruption, the people **did not remember the Lord** nor His gracious provision to **deliver** them **from** their **enemies on all sides** (v. 34). Additionally, the people acted harshly against Gideon and his household despite any of the **good** things that God had done through him to deliver **Israel** (v. 35). The children of Israel had completely abandoned the Lord to serve the pagan gods of the nations around them; they abandoned the One who had rescued them from Egypt, enabled them to conquer the Promised Land, and delivered them from oppression.

Although God used Gideon in a mighty way and called him from the service of Baal to His service, Gideon failed to point people to the Lord by the way that he lived. At times, he gave lip-service and recognition to the Lord while in other instances he glorified himself and resorted to idolatry which led others in the nation of Israel astray. Our sole purpose is to glorify the Lord by worshiping Him alone, by obediently serving Him, and by loving others just as He first loved us. When we promote our own strength and power, we set people up for failure because only Christ offers hope and victory. At times, we will fail and if we are the authority to which people point as an example or in whom they have confidence it will devastate their faith. Instead, we ought to be conduits of the power and authority of Christ who never fails; therefore, people need to see Christ living in us and the transformation that He has wrought in our lives. Let us be transformed

from self-glorification to the glorification of the Lord so that others may know from whom our strength, authority, and victory come and that they might have life through Him just as abundantly as we do.

Despite all the good things we may do, why are they null and void if we don't point others to Christ?

Question
10

Inspire

After Mary Fuller-Pride sat in her Connect Class and listened to the story of Gideon, she began to realize just how self-absorbed and self-focused she had become. As the Spirit spoke to her, she began to take stock of what the Lord had done in her life instead of focusing on *her own* efforts. No matter how great the decorations or teaching at VBS was, Mary Fuller-Pride realized that she could save no one; she was only an instrument in the hands of the Lord. She also began to think about how God gifted the entire church to work and serve together to share the gospel of Christ—the One who has the power to save and transform. Consequently, she understood that God should receive all the glory for what He had done and how He had equipped her to reap a harvest of seven souls despite her pride and self-glorification. God, therefore, should be commended because He worked miraculously through an imperfect person to bring a radical and life-changing message to others.

From that day forward, Mary Fuller-Pride had a renewed spirit of cooperation in the church and people enjoyed serving alongside of her. She had discovered a great reward not only for following Christ, but also for giving Him the glory. The ministries in which she participated were more satisfying because she had abundant joy in her life; no longer was

Inspire

she consumed with her own preferences, but she was motivated to serve the Lord and bring glory to His name. She didn't become easily frustrated anymore with other people because they didn't meet her standards or do what she expected, but she saw them as those whom God has called and empowered to do His will even though they are imperfect individuals. Perhaps, in some ways, we have become like Gideon and focused on self in our lives; maybe we have easily become frustrated or more critical of people because we think we can do better or we have different preferences or standards which we find more important. In other cases, we might do things to receive recognition or have a pat on the back from people thanking us for doing a great job—and we don't give any honor and glory to the Lord. As we evaluate our own lives, we must be transformed from self-glorification to the glorification of the Lord; only the Lord deserves honor and glory because He is the only One who has propelled us to victory and transformed us to serve.

Incorporate

What areas in your life could be the source of most pride? How can you keep these areas from leading to arrogance or boastfulness?

Incorporate

In your life, who watches or imitates you? How can you make sure that you point them to Christ and not your own achievements or preferences?

How can self-glorification and pride destroy unity in the church?

April 15, 2018



*Be Transformed from
Self-centered to God-focused*
Judges 9:1-57

Focal Verse:

"Please speak in the hearing of all the men of Shechem: 'Which is better for you, that all seventy of the sons of Jerubbaal reign over you, or that one reign over you?' Remember that I am your own flesh and bone."

Judges 9:2

back to
Table of
Contents

Introduce

At an early age, children have already learned to become territorial and self-centered especially with things they treasure. By the age of two, most children have already mastered the phrase “mine” and it has become more difficult to teach them to share. Yet, how many adults never outgrow this attitude of self-centeredness and constantly seek to satisfy their own desires without regard for others? Unfortunately, we live in a self-centered world that has increasingly become all about “me” and “my” preferences. Instead of serving others and seeing ourselves as a community, we see ourselves as individuals and seek to achieve our own goals—sometimes at the expense of the community. If they don’t get their way, many adults still throw child-like tantrums and proclaim themselves as victims of unfortunate circumstance in hopes of getting what they want.

Every Sunday at church, I pass by a little girl eating her breakfast burrito. With a smile revealing few teeth in front, she carefully works the burrito into a position on the side of her mouth where she can take a healthy bite. Often, I stop and jokingly ask where my burrito is or if she had brought that one for me. Quickly, her eyebrows furl inwardly and the smile on her face



turns into an expression of consternation as she quickly pulls the burrito to the safety of her chest and clutches it so tightly that the egg and cheese protrudes a little from the end. Then, she boldly declares, “That’s my burrito. You’ll have to buy your own.” No one had to formally teach this child to

Introduce

respond in that way, but she learned it as she observed and interacted with others in our society. Being selfish and self-centered are innate—something we don't have to learn. However, we must work to become the opposite in Jesus Christ. Consequently, we must allow Christ to transform us from being self-centered to being God-focused in everything that we say and do.

In [Judges 9](#), Gideon's sons, particularly Abimelech who sought to become king, were self-centered. As we will see, their self-centeredness caused a civil war within Israel as different factions struggled to assert their power. Although Gideon had recognized that only the Lord should be king and exercise authority over Israel ([Judg 8:23](#)), Abimelech actually sought that power for himself by murdering all except one of his brothers who escaped. Then, to maintain that authority, he engaged in a long struggle with his extended family that ultimately ended in his death; all these heartaches and tragedies were caused by the self-centered perspective of one man, but imagine for a moment how it could become multiplied when an entire community or nation has citizens who seek only their best interest and not the will of the Lord. Therefore, we must allow Christ to transform us from self-centered to God-centered in our focus whereby we have His interests at heart and seek to represent Him to the community around us by serving selflessly and faithfully.

Key Question

In what ways do we see self-centeredness manifested in our world today?

THE DELUSION OF SELF-CENTEREDNESS:

In [Judges 8:31](#), we first met Abimelech—one of Gideon’s seventy sons who was born to one of his mistresses (**concubines**). Although Gideon verbally refused the kingship over Israel and reminded them that the Lord should rightfully reign over them, he curiously named this son Abimelech, which means “my father the king.” Because Gideon had established himself as de facto king, Abimelech desired all the more not only the title, but the power and authority associated with a royal reign. As a result, he went to **his mother’s** family to persuade them to make him **king** over Israel (v. 1). In a speech directed toward **the men of Shechem**, he attempted to appeal to them logically by asking a rhetorical question: **Is it better for seventy sons of Gideon to reign over you** or just **one** (v. 2)? He then reminded them that he was their direct descendent (i.e. **flesh and blood**) since Gideon had many wives who had borne him sons. Quickly, **all the men** agreed **to follow Abimelech** and make him their **king** because he was their own relative (v. 3). As a tribute and to show their good faith, they **gave him seventy shekels of silver from the temple of Baal-Berith** treasury (v. 4).



Through both Abimelech and the **men of Shechem’s** actions, we can observe the delusion of self-centeredness on full display. First, as we will see later in this story, Abimelech did not truly care about the people over

Instruct

whom he would reign—even though they were his own relatives—but instead he wanted absolute power and devotion all for himself (see [Judg 9:15, 20](#)). People with self-centered motivation often use others in such a way to benefit and prosper at their expense rather than serve them in such a way that they mature and prosper together as a community. In 1887, a British nobleman by the name of John Acton famously wrote, “Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” A person without a God-centered focus will usually fail to see the value of other human beings—such as when Abimelech has sixty-eight of his own brothers murdered. Moreover, such people will also view relationships solely in terms of what they can receive rather than what they can contribute; therefore, relationships become disposable when that person ceases to be useful or beneficial to their plans.

How does (or should) our relationship with Christ affect the way we see others?

Question
1

Second, the **men of Shechem** acted quickly to name their relative as king because they expected to receive favors and special treatment from him whereas they felt the other half-brothers would only favor their own families (see [Judg 9:15](#)). Thus, they wanted Abimelech as their king solely because they would benefit directly from that relationship. Today, we still have trouble with nepotism and corruption caused by people expecting favors from family members or close associates in high positions—Abimelech and his family were no different. We see this type of mindset pervade almost every facet of our culture as well as in the church. However,

as believers, our focus should not be about what we can get, but about what we can give and how we can serve. We should elevate Christ by serving others and making the gospel known unto them so that they may know how to have eternal life.

In what ways can we help others see that the church is not about our perspectives and our needs, but about Christ and His will for us collectively?

Question
2

Not only did his self-centeredness result from his pride and lust for power, but it also led to his paranoia. Because he became paranoid, he tried to eliminate all competition to the throne; therefore, using the money he had received from **the temple** treasury, he **hired worthless and reckless men** to kill his **brothers**. These men went to **Ophrah**, his father's homeland, and **killed** all his **brothers** except **Jotham** who fled and **hid** (v. 5). Although we all should exercise caution to discern people's motives and evaluate them according to the Lord's standards, self-centered people often become hyper-sensitive and paranoid, seeking to eliminate or re-direct anything or anyone that they may deem a threat to their ultimate goal. Nevertheless, after Abimelech had his brothers murdered to ensure that he would become **king**, **all the men of Shechem gathered** and anointed him at the monument beside the **terebinth tree** near the city (v. 6).



THE DESTRUCTIVENESS OF SELF-CENTEREDNESS:

After coming out of hiding, **Jotham**, the only one of Gideon's sons to escape Abimelech's execution orders, ascends to the top of **Mount Gerizim** to address the citizens of **Shechem** from afar in safety (v. 7). He speaks to them using a fable to show them their folly of following Abimelech and making him their king. In this story, the **trees**, which symbolically stand for **the men of Shechem**, go **forth** in search of a **king** to **reign over** them (v. 8). In reality, however, Abimelech approached them and persuaded them to **anoint** him as **king**; yet, through this fable, **Jotham** illustrates the eagerness of the citizens of **Shechem** to accept him as their **king**—not so much the literal sequence of events. He uses four different types of **trees/plants** to symbolize the types of people whom they have asked to **reign over** them as their **king**. The first three represent people with noble purposes who rule with **honor** and righteousness, devoting themselves to the service of their constituents rather than seeking power and prestige for themselves. First, the **olive tree** perhaps represents the most valuable commodity in the ancient world with a wide array of uses as food, oil for cooking, and oil for anointing the **king** chosen by God (vv. 9-10). Second, **the fig tree** was also valuable to people because it could function as food (**good fruit**),



sweetener used in cooking, and juice used to drink (vv. 11-12). Finally, **the vine** fulfilled the same useful function to the community as the first two in that it provided both food and drink useful to **God and men** (vv. 12-13). All three of these people represented by these plants, therefore, did not seek the kingship for themselves because they had more honorable and functional purposes in serving the community rather than being in a position in which they themselves would be served.

What are the characteristics of a God-focused person?

Question
3

Lastly, the **men of Shechem** approach **the bramble**—a thorny weed-like shrub—that doesn't have any useful purpose, but only seeks to **devour** and destroy things at its own expense so it may flourish (vv. 14-15). Although this type of leader may sound like he cares about people and wants to provide for them, in reality he is self-centered and only acts in such a way that benefits him. Therefore, **the bramble** may seem to offer the people **shelter** from its **shade** and protection if they **anoint** him **king**, but if they do not he will destroy them like a raging forest **fire** devouring **the cedars in Lebanon**. Consequently, this ruler isn't concerned with the well-being of the people and what he can benevolently provide for them like the three previous plants, but instead he is an opportunist who seeks power, glory, and fortune for himself alone. Often, this type of leader promises great things which sound wonderful, but fails to deliver anything except for devastation and destruction when all is said and done.

What are the characteristics of a self-centered person?

Question
4

Instruct

At the end of this fable, Jotham outlines the destruction that self-centeredness brings not only upon the people themselves, but also those around them. First, he accuses **the men of Shechem** of acting treacherously against Gideon (**Jerubbaal**) and his family (v. 16). He opens this section by making the statements “**if you have acted in truth and sincerity**” and “**if you have dealt with Jerubbaal . . . as he deserves.**” He poses these questions in such a way that they function contrary to the actual facts, so that the people might think about the consequences of their actions and truly see the folly in which they have engaged. Therefore, he offers these scathing remarks because the people **of Shechem** have not acted in **truth and sincerity** nor have they **dealt** with Gideon’s family justly as they **deserve**. For this reason, Jotham proceeds to outline how they had acted treacherously by reminding them that Gideon had **fought for** them, **risked his life for** them, and **delivered** them **from Midian** (v. 17); instead, they have responded by **rising up against** his **household**, killing **his sons**, and naming the self-serving Abimelech as **king** (v. 18).

Sarcastically, he concludes by calling them to **rejoice** if indeed they **acted** with **truth and sincerity**, hoping that they may realize what they have done; however, he also calls them to judgment in which **fire devours** or destroys each of the parties involved. From the rest of the story, we know that a civil war breaks out amongst the different factions and each of the people or citizens of the cities involved are destroyed. Even in our own day, we must realize that self-centeredness always leads to destruction because there is no repentance or forgiveness since one is never wrong, there is no cooperation since everyone seeks his own best

interest, there is a lack of wisdom which leads to poor choices based on promises which may sound beneficial, and there is arrogance in which a person sees himself as superior to others. Therefore, we must seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to become more Christ-like by serving others rather than having a self-serving outlook (see [Mark 10:45](#)). After making this pronouncement, Jotham fled to **Beer** where he remained for fear that his brother would try to kill him too (v. 21).



In what ways is self-centeredness destructive to both the individual and the community?

Question
5

Judges 9:22-55

THE DEMISE OF SELF-CENTEREDNESS:

Although Abimelech **reigned** without incident for **three years**, God allowed animosity to develop between the king and **the men of Shechem** so that they began to deal **treacherously** with him (vv. 22-23). God allowed this **ill will** to develop as judgment upon those who participated in the murder of Gideon's sons: Abimelech, who actually had them **killed**, and **the men of Shechem** who had helped him (v. 24). This spirit of **ill will** arose when the men of Shechem became greedy and laid **in ambush in the mountains** to rob everyone who passed by—including those from Abimelech (v. 25). Those who have a self-centered perspective may cooperate with others for a while, but ultimately their

Instruct

greed and personal desires will become manifest in their actions and lead to division in the community which cannot be overcome because everyone wants it his own way.

Another charismatic leader by the name of **Gaal** began to incite his own family members against Abimelech, so his **brothers** accompanied him to **Shechem** where the people placed **their confidence in him** (v. 26). In celebration, they **ate and drank** wine from the **grapes** gathered in their vineyard, mocking and **cursing** Abimelech (v. 27). **Gaal** questions why they should submit to two outsiders, **Abimelech** and his commander **Zebul**; instead, he proposes that they serve one of their own relatives from Shechem born into the family of **Hamor** their founding father (v.



28). Using tactics similar to Abimelech's three years earlier, **Gaal** suggests that they name him the ruler because if this town were under his authority he would **remove** Abimelech and free them (v. 29). He even concludes this wild and drunken celebration by taunting Abimelech and telling him to

gather (**increase**) his **army** and **come out** to fight.

In what ways does self-centeredness create an unnecessary and harmful spirit of competition?

Question
6

When **Zebul** heard what **Gaal** had said, he immediately sent word to Abimelech, making him aware of the people's intention to revolt (vv. 30-31).

Therefore, he urges the king to gather his troops and come **at night** so that they can bombard the city by surprise early the next **morning** and stop the revolt dead in its tracks (vv. 32-34). That next morning, Gaal stood at the city gate and began to see the movement of Abimelech's troops when they began descending from the mountains to attack (v. 35). However, when **Gaal** stated that he saw these **people coming down**, **Zebul** responded derisively saying his eyes were playing tricks on him; he was only seeing **shadows of the mountains** moving slowly in the sunlight (v. 36). When **Gaal** saw two other companies of soldiers moving from the center and from the direction of a specific, well-known **tree**, he realized that the city was under attack (v. 37).

Then, **Zebul** taunted **Gaal** saying, "**Where is your mouth now?**" In our modern language, Gaal has a big **mouth**, so Zebul asks what he will do now that he is face to face with Abimelech's army (v. 38). With some fortitude, Gaal and his forces go out to fight, but they are quickly defeated at the **gate** to the **city** and many fell while others **fled**, so Gaal and his brothers were driven from Shechem (vv. 39-41). Even though Abimelech had defeated the military leaders of Shechem, it still did not appease his wrath. **The next day**

the citizens of the city had returned to their normal duties and chores, but Abimelech **divided** his army into **three companies** and attacked the unarmed, unsuspecting people (vv. 42-43). He then led his company to the city gate where he waged war on the inhabitants, killing all the people therein; the other



Instruct

two companies then killed all the people who had gone out to farm the fields (vv. 44-45). Abimelech then completely razed the city and covered it with salt as a symbol that it should never be rebuilt again.

How does unrestrained boasting not only hurt our testimony, but also cause strife?

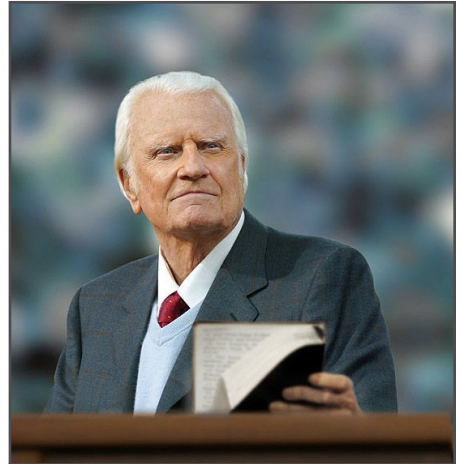
Question
#7

Meanwhile, Abimelech discovered that some of **the men** from **Shechem** had fled to the safety of **the temple of Baal-berith** (vv. 46-47). They had entered the strongest, most-secure portion of the temple which they felt they could easily defend, but it actually became their death sentence. Abimelech **cut down** branches from nearby **trees**, placed them around the base of the structure, and ordered his men to do likewise (v. 48). They then lit the structure on fire, killing **about one thousand men and women** that day (v. 49).

Despite destroying Shechem completely and killing all its citizens, Abimelech still continued his murderous rampage, taking out his frustration and hatred on the people of **Thebez** (v. 50). Like Shechem, the citizens of **Thebez** had retreated to their **tower** and locked themselves inside for protection (v. 51). Already having great military success in murdering the people of Shechem by burning them alive in their tower, he attempted to do the same here (v. 52). This time, however, a woman **dropped a millstone** from above, **crushing** Abimelech's **skull** as he tried to set the building on fire (v. 53). Although it didn't kill him instantly, it was a mortal wound, so he ordered his **armorbearer** to **kill** him with his **sword** because he didn't want to be dishonored for having been **killed by a woman** (v. 54). With their leader **dead, the men of Israel** returned

home, seemingly unaffected by his death (v. 55).

A self-centered person will leave a negative impression upon someone, but they almost always leave emotional, mental, and many times physical destruction in their wake because they only did things that benefited themselves rather than benefited the community. When we focus on God and glorify Him through our obedient service, we will leave a positive impression and a lasting impact upon the world. People will see an imperfect person at times, but one forgiven and transformed by Christ. It gives the world hope through Christ because we have a positive, life-changing message that we share. When we have a relationship with Christ, we will place others before ourselves and have a supernatural love that seeks the best for them. When we have been transformed by Christ, we don't seek to avenge the wrongs that people have perpetrated and we don't seek positions of power or authority because God will equip us to accomplish His will. By focusing on Christ, we can have contentment and satisfaction because we have a Savior who loves us, gave His life for us, and offers us security with eternal life.



Billy Graham
Nov 7, 1918 – Feb 21, 2018

In what ways does someone who lives a transformed life in Christ impact the world?

Question
8

Judges 9:56-57

THE DISCIPLINE FROM GOD FOR SELF-CENTEREDNESS:

The era of Gideon concludes by demonstrating how God **repaid the**

Instruct

wickedness of **Abimelech** and **the evil** and treachery of **the men of Shechem** who conspired together to murder innocent people (vv. 56-57). For a moment, **evil** seemed to triumph when Abimelech murdered sixty-eight of his brothers and reigned without incident for three years. God, however, allowed these events to take their course and **the evil** that each of these parties did eventually found them out (see [Num 32:23](#)). By abandoning them to their own selfish desires since they didn't seek Him, God allowed their own ill will and self-centeredness to consume them, thereby leading ultimately to their destruction and death. In other words, their selfish, rebellious nature caused their own downfall. Consequently, the worst thing that could ever happen to us would be for God to remove His hand from our lives and allow us to follow our passions and desires without bounds (see [Rom 1:24](#)). However, for those of us who have a relationship with God, He will never abandon us, but He will discipline us as His children for our self-centeredness. Therefore, let us ask God to help transform us from self-centered people to people focused wholly on Him.

Why should we allow God to enact justice and vengeance upon people and not take matters into our own hands?

Question
9

Inspire

We live in a self-centered world which is on a path to destruction apart from Jesus Christ. Looking at the world around us, we may see people acting heroically and generously from time to time, but this has become more of the exception than the rule. For the most part, we see people

acting selfishly, seeking that which benefits them above everyone else. As I was writing this lesson, I skimmed the headlines on the Internet and came across an article about two men on a Southwest Airlines' flight from Dallas to Los Angeles who had a violent physical altercation over space in the overhead bin. Although the problem could have easily been resolved by cooperation and a calm discussion, these self-absorbed and self-centered men came to blows because they couldn't civilly discuss a solution. Unfortunately, we see more and more of this type of behavior every day because the media and culture bombard us with images and programs depicting people who seek to have every desire fulfilled by demanding to get their way or else.

As believers, we ought to point others to Christ by having actions and attitudes that reflect Him. Although this is a difficult task because of our sinful, fleshly nature, it is not impossible because we have the Spirit of God living within us. When we focus on Christ, obeying, worshiping, and serving Him will become a priority in our lives. We will have a burden for those who don't know Him as their Savior and will be motivated to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. Not only will we be able to love our family and friends unconditionally, but we will also be able to love our neighbors as ourselves and even love our enemies who have wrong us. Through this radical transformation, God will be glorified and others will see Christ living in us and be drawn into a relationship with Him.

In Reference



Janine Puhak, "[Violent Brawl Delays Southwest Airlines Flight after Overhead Bin Fight](https://www.foxnews.com/story/2018/03/08/violent-brawl-delays-southwest-airlines-flight-after-overhead-bin-fight)," accessed on www.foxnews.com (March 8, 2018).

Incorporate

In what ways have you been self-centered in your life? How has God helped you to overcome it? If there are still areas in which God reveals you exhibit self-centeredness, pray and ask Him to help you overcome them.

How does self-centeredness destroy the family today? What can we do to overcome self-centeredness in our families and help teach our children / grandchildren / relatives the value of being God-focused?

In what ways can self-centeredness harm fellowship in the church and distract from the ability to share the gospel?

April 22, 2018



*Be Transformed from
Inconsistency to Consistency*
Judges 10:1-18

Focal Verse:

“So the Lord said to the children of Israel, “Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites and from the people of Ammon and from the Philistines? . . . you cried out to Me, and I delivered you from their hand.”

Judges 10:11-12

back to
Table of
Contents

Introduce

If one could describe Ida-Mae Bee, it would perhaps be that she was consistently *inconsistent* in everything that she did. Although she was the sweetest and most generous person that one could ever meet, no one could ever rely on Ida-Mae for anything because she became too easily distracted, constantly forgot things, typically procrastinated finding herself rushed and in a bind, and always made excuses for her failures rather than taking steps to fix them. Attending church services regularly as a child, she had become highly irregular as an adult because she didn't "feel" transformed nor did she see any evidence of that change in her life. Saved as a young child at the age of eight, Ida-Mae tried to read the Bible when she could and pray when she had a pressing need, but she never developed any consistency in cultivating her relationship with the Lord; it was like everything else in her life—inconsistent. Even though her parents took her to church almost every Sunday, she never saw them read Scripture at home, have a family time of devotion together, or pray beyond giving thanks before a meal. Unfortunately, as an adult, she was now passing this same inconsistency on to her children, but to an even greater degree.



Transformation, however, is not a "feeling" we have, but it is the reality of the way that we live when we devote ourselves to the Lord and allow Him to guide us daily. By its very definition, to devote ourselves to someone or something requires consistency. If we devote ourselves in marriage, for example, we should always be faithful—not just when it's convenient or we feel like it. If we devote ourselves to our education and careers, we

Introduce

don't merely receive a degree and then never again learn anything else about our field; on the contrary, we consistently read and analyze significant publications and trends in our fields as well as take seminars and courses to improve our skills and learn new techniques or technologies. If we devote ourselves to a sports team, we follow them on a consistent basis, know their players, and chart their progress—lest we become a “fair-weather” fan. Yet, why are so many people like Ida-Mae Bee when it comes to our consistency with the Lord even when we have a relationship with Christ which guarantees transformation? The transformation Jesus offers through salvation is immediate in terms of moving from death to life, but complete transformation of our attitude and actions is a life-long process that requires consistency so that we mature and become more like Him each day.

[Judges 10](#) describes a period where Israel was like Ida-Mae Bee: consistently inconsistent with her relationship with the Lord. The pattern of Israel's rejection and disobedience to the Lord was indeed consistent: Israel sinned by worshiping other gods, God allowed a foreign nation to rule over and oppress them, and they cried out in anguish to the Lord. God always graciously responded by rescuing them, but rather than repenting and turning to the Lord Israel went right back to doing evil even after they had seen Him work mightily. Because God has always been faithful and devoted Himself to His people, we as His people need to devote ourselves to Him and be transformed from inconsistency to consistency in our relationship with Him.

Key
Question

What can we do to guard against inconsistency in our lives when it comes to our relationship with Christ?

THE PATTERN CAUSED BY INCONSISTENCY:

When we examine the first five verses of [chapter 10](#), we may wonder why it's important to study them, because like Shamgar in [3:31](#), these seem like insignificant judges only mentioned once in the Bible as an afterthought. Indeed, not much is known about these judges or the events during the approximately sixty-three years which this chapter spans, but they still have significance as part of God's Word. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul writes, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." These verses in Judges are no exception because they help us to establish a pattern of Israel's sinfulness that ought to be corrected even among people in our modern era. Israel was consistent in one thing—in doing evil in the sight of the Lord rather than worshiping and obediently serving Him alone. We have already seen this pattern throughout Judges spanning generations, but in these few verses the contrast becomes even more dramatic as the people's propensity to sin and God's grace to deliver stand side-by-side in short succession.



Why is it important to recognize patterns, such as Israel's consistent sin, in the Bible?

Question
1

Instruct

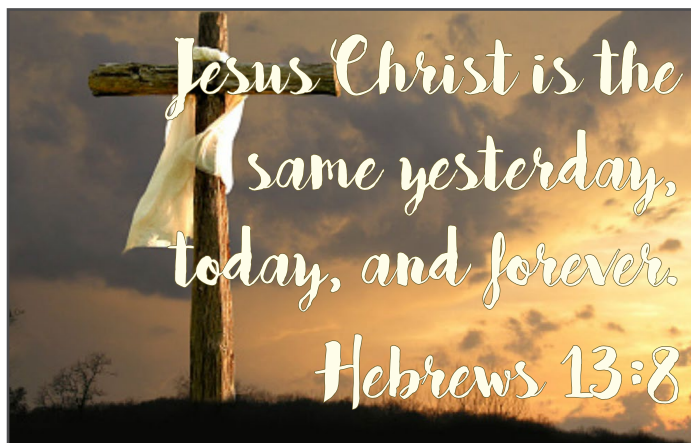
With the death of **Abimelech**, Israel entered a period of turmoil and rapid decline as two judges led over a period of forty-five years: **Tola** for **twenty-three years** and **Jair** for **twenty-two** years (vv. 2-3). This stands in contrast to the earlier judges whom God had raised and through whom He had delivered Israel, giving peace (**rest**) to the land anywhere between forty to eighty years ([Judg 3:11; 3:30; 5:31; and 8:28](#)). In fact, when we get to the destruction and turmoil created by **Abimelech** and his self-centeredness, peace is notably absent—and even here in Judges 10:1-5 the narrator makes no mention of any peace as a result of these judges' reigns. As we will see, the absence of peace in the land demonstrates how thoroughly corrupt Israel had become and how quickly they had turned to the worship of false gods, forsaking the Lord completely (see [v. 6](#)).

In-Depth Information



*We don't know much about these two judges other than what is recorded here in these verses. We know only some about their tribes, their lineage, their length of rule, and their death. **Tola**, which means "worm," is from the tribe of **Issachar**, his father was **Puah** and grandfather **Dodo**, and he resided and is buried in **Shamir** in **the mountains of Ephraim** (vv.1-2). **Jair**, which means "may God enlighten," is from the tribe of Manasseh and dwelt in Gilead where his **thirty sons** ruled over **thirty** cities; in this context, **Havoth-Jair** simply means "the towns of Jair" (vv. 3-5). Thus, the reference to riding on **thirty donkeys** probably signifies their status as rulers as this was the preferred mode of transportation in the Ancient Near East for the wealthy and dignitaries.*

So, having read this, we may still be wondering what valuable information we can glean from these scant details. By establishing this pattern of Israel's sin and God's deliverance, we see the need for consistency in our walk with Christ in our daily lives. We shouldn't continually live in a pattern of sin as though God will always graciously forgive us when we cry out, but we must be thoroughly transformed through the power of Christ into people whom He can use; therefore, we must seek to pattern ourselves after the One who is consistent. Throughout Scripture, we are told to pattern our lives after the Lord ([Lev 19:2](#); [Matt 5:48](#) ; [Eph 5:1](#); [Phil 2:5](#)); God is always consistent in His promises ([Psalm 33:11](#)), in His Word ([Titus 1:2](#)), in His love for us ([Psalm 136](#)), and even in His discipline ([Mal 3:4-6](#)). Because God has sent His Spirit to dwell in our hearts, we too can have consistency in our lives when we obediently surrender to Him. If God is consistent, therefore, the guidance that He gives through His Spirit will coincide with His character and He will produce consistency within us as well; we simply must be willing to cultivate that relationship with Him by devoting time and service to Him daily.



How have you seen God's consistency demonstrated in your life?

Question
2

THE PROBLEM CREATED BY INCONSISTENCY:

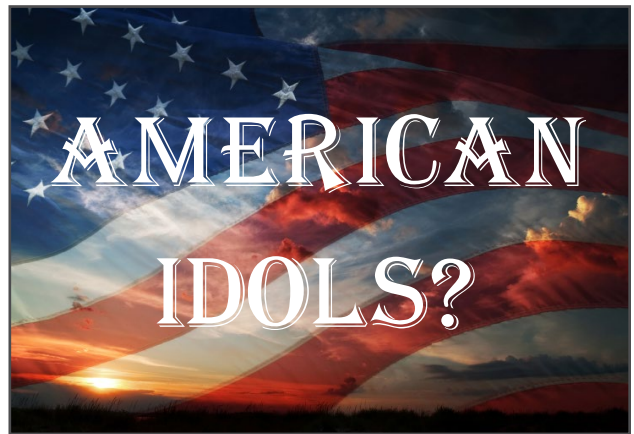
After this brief introduction which highlights Israel's inconsistency in worshiping the Lord, we arrive at the root of the problem: sin in the form of idolatry (v. 6). Once **again, Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord** and they worshiped the gods of the foreign nations around them instead of the One true and living God. We have seen these two charges levied against Israel numerous times in Judges already, but here in verse 6 it demonstrates how thoroughly corrupt they had become. The narrator begins by generally describing how Israel **served all the Baals and the Astheroeths**, emphasizing that they worshiped many false gods concurrently. Previously, the narrator highlighted how Israel had worshiped a single foreign god from one of the nations living among them, but here they are said to worship the gods of five nations at once: **Syria, Sidon, Moab, Ammon, and the Philistines**. These five nations represent the most-significant people groups inhabiting the land of Canaan at the time, thereby showing how totally sinful and corrupt Israel had become; in the past, they had worshiped one false god from a single nation, but now they worship the gods of every nation with whom they have contact.

Using Scripture, how can we overcome temptation and the problem of sin created by inconsistency in our lives?

Question
3

As if worshiping other gods weren't bad enough, Israel completely abandoned the Lord and stopped serving Him altogether. Two times

previously in [Judges 2:12-13](#) it has been noted that Israel **forsook the Lord**; however, here not only did Israel forsake the Lord, but they also **did not serve Him**. The Lord wasn't one God among many to Israel in their pantheon of false gods, but instead they wholly rejected Him; they worshiped every other god except the One true and living God who had delivered them from bondage in Egypt, given them the land promised to Abraham, and graciously rescued them each time they sinned here in the book of Judges. Any sin is an affront to the Lord, but particularly heinous is abandoning the worship of the One who created and can save us. In our world, inconsistent worship of the Lord creates a void in our lives, so that we seek other people, things, or activities with which to fill it. Israel sinfully filled that void by worshiping graven images of false gods. Whereas most modern people don't literally worship graven images people still commit idolatry by making the Lord the lesser priority in their lives.



What is the evidence in our world today that many people have abandoned the worship of the Lord altogether?

Question # 4

Judges 10:7-14

THE PUNISHMENT ENACTED BECAUSE OF INCONSISTENCY:
As a result of Israel's complete abandonment of the Lord, His **anger** burned **hot against** the people and He gave them **into the hands of the**

Instruct

Philistines and Ammonites (v. 7). God’s justified actions in this account demonstrate that the problem of sin leads directly to this punishment for inconsistent worship; therefore, for **eighteen years**, the Ammonites **harassed** and **oppressed all** the tribes who had settled on the east side of the **Jordan** River in the land formerly occupied by **the Amorites** (v. 8). Although in English the terms **harassed** and **oppressed** have negative connotations, they lesson the Hebrew words which actually mean “shattered” and “crushed.” Just as Israel had thoroughly forsaken and abandoned the Lord, God had used these two foreign nations to subdue and demoralize the people completely in their sins. What Joshua had warned the people against when they had committed to serve the Lord at the end of the conquest of Canaan had now happened: “If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good” ([Josh 24:20](#)). Sin has grave consequences and we must take them seriously—not just because we seek to avoid punishment, but so we can honor the Lord with our actions because of all the good things He has done for us.



What are some of the consequences that our sin has?

Question
5

After shattering and crushing the tribes on the east side of the **Jordan**, the Ammonites **crossed over** to the west **to fight against** the other tribes, **severely** distressing **Israel** as a whole (v. 9). With nowhere else to turn,

Israel **cried out to the Lord** and for the first time in this book acknowledge their **sin**; they acknowledge that they **have sinned against** the Lord by forsaking Him and serving **the Baals** (v. 10). Yet, at this point, the people only offered lip service to God in trying to escape this predicament they brought upon themselves. As we will see in the Lord's response, the people were not genuine in their sorrow and they did not yet repent of their wickedness. Because the Lord knows the hearts of both individuals and nations, His response demonstrated that Israel lacked sincerity with their cry for deliverance.

In response to their cry, the Lord reminded them about all the instances He had previously acted in their favor to deliver them (vv. 10-12). In a series of questions, He rehearsed how He had **delivered** them from **the Egyptians** ([Exod 12](#)), **the Amorites** ([Josh 24](#)), **the Sidonians and the Amalekites** ([Exod 17](#)), **the Maonites** (i.e. the Midianites [Judg 6-7](#)), and currently the Ammonites and **Philistines**. God had always graciously acted to deliver Israel from these nations, but the people never truly repented; therefore, God emphatically states that He **will deliver** them **no more** (v. 13). To help them recognize the folly of their ways, He tells them to **go and cry out to the gods** they **have chosen and let** them **deliver** them (v. 14). This would eventually awaken Israel because these **gods** have no power to respond or ability to help remove Israel's **distress**; consequently, they would soon recognize who the only God is—the One whom they had rejected.

Even though we can't see a person's heart as God does, how can we evaluate whether a person is truly sorry or repentant?

Question
6

Instruct

In His foreknowledge God already knew that He would ultimately deliver Israel because He includes the Ammonites and **Philistines** as part of the list of instances in which He has rescued the people (see v. 10). He isn't inconsistent with His Word, but He is using an object lesson to teach the people the meaning of true repentance. At this point, the people were sorry they got caught and, as a result, were suffering tremendously. They weren't sorry for their sins and would not truly repent until verse 16. Today, many people are like Israel; they aren't sorry for their sins, but they



are merely distressed over their suffering or punishment. Perhaps the best illustration of this lack of repentance that fits all of us is a ticket or fine for a traffic offense—whether speeding, running a red light, unsafe lane change, etc. For the most part, we're not truly sorry

for breaking the law; we only regret that the police officer or camera was in a position to see and catch us. Even if we watch our driving habits for a few days, we will soon begin doing the very same thing that got us in trouble in the first place. Although we may acknowledge our sins and even identify ourselves as sinners, it takes true repentance through Christ to turn from them.

According to Romans 6, why should we not live in a lifestyle of sin still expecting God's forgiveness?

Question
7

THE PLAN FOR DEALING WITH INCONSISTENCY:

After hearing the Lord's response, the people continued to cry out to Him; once again, they acknowledge the fact they **have sinned** and they begin to recognize the consequences of their actions—for they tell God **to do to** them **whatever seems best** in His eyes (v. 15). This time, however, when they **pray** for deliverance, they respond with actions that show true repentance. They stopped worshiping these **foreign gods** and once again **served the Lord** alone (v. 16). When God saw their true repentance as expressed through their transformed actions, He had mercy on them and would then act to deliver them (in [chapter 11](#)). The chapter concludes with both **the people of Ammon encamped at Gilead** and **the children of Israel at Mizaph** ready to wage war (v. 17). The **children of Israel** then ponder **who** will lead them into battle against the Ammonites (v. 18), but in an adaptation of Paul Harvey's famous phrase: "Tune in next week for the rest of the story."

The plan for dealing with inconsistency begins with true repentance—not merely lip service designed to get us out of trouble. When we don't truly understand the consequences of our sin and don't have remorse for what we have done, we will constantly return to our previous pattern of following our fleshly desires. Certainly, children can understand the concept of repentance and have a relationship with the Lord, but as we grow and mature in Him we must move from inconsistency to consistency in our lives. This requires that we acknowledge our sin, turn to Christ, and then allow His Spirit to guide our steps and guard our hearts. True repentance, therefore, is always accompanied by action; we can't merely say that we are sorry in passing as if to escape judgment,

Instruct

but our repentance must be demonstrated in our lives through the change that Christ brings. Consequently, let us worship the Lord consistently as demonstrated through our obedient actions and worshipful service which we do because we love Him—not because we are obligated to do so for a greater reward.

In what ways does true repentance lead to consistency in our lives through Christ?

Question
8

Inspire

On one of the rare Sundays that Ida-Mae Bee attended church, the pastor preached on being consistent in our worship of the Lord by giving Him priority in our lives. As she listened, she began to realize how inconsistent she had truly been: she rarely prayed, she seldom opened her Bible, she never gave her tithes and offerings, she never served in the church using any of her God-given abilities, and she only regarded her relationship with the Lord as a priority when she needed something or had difficulties in her life. She began thinking about other relationships in her life and wondered what would happen to them if she treated them as inconsistently as she treated the Lord. Certainly, she would have never gotten married if she hadn't invested a tremendous amount of time and effort in getting to know her future husband and cultivating a relationship with him. If she rarely responded to His phone calls or texts, acted like spending time with him was worse than going to the dentist, or contacted him only when she needed something, he would likely have given up pursuing her long ago. Yet, she realized that God had always pursued a relationship with her even

though she had acted just like this to Him.

At the invitation, Ida-Mae went forward to re-dedicate her life, confessing that she had gone astray and left the first-love of her life—Christ. With tears she wept as she understood how gracious and patient the Lord had been and how many times He tried to correct her gently, but she just wouldn't listen. Along with her tears and remorse came action—true repentance. Christ had helped her to understand it's not merely a "feeling" that one has, but it is a personal relationship with the Creator whereby we surrender our lives fully to Him. That night, she began reading her Bible, starting in the book of John, and praying. She began praying about how to be a better servant for the Lord which would translate into being a better wife, mother, sister, aunt, and co-worker. She began searching for a place to serve in the church, understanding that God must be the priority in every area. These actions didn't continue for just a few weeks, although she struggled at times, but they defined her life as she expressed her devotion to the Lord through her obedience and service. God had thoroughly transformed Ida-Mae Bee from being inconsistent to one who consistently worshiped and served Him. If God can overcome the circumstances and transform Ida-Mae's life, He can transform each and every one of us so that we become consistent in our worship of the only Lord and Savior—Jesus Christ.

Incorporate

In what ways have you been or are you inconsistent in your life?

What are the reasons for these inconsistencies in your life? Who is to blame?

How have you seen God's transformation to help you become more consistent in honoring Him, obeying Him, worshiping Him, and serving Him?

April 29, 2018



*Be Transformed from
Impulsiveness to Sensibility*
Judges 11:1-40

Focal Verse:

"And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord, and said, 'If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands . . . whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me . . . I will offer it up as a burnt offering.'"

Judges 11:30-31

back to
Table of
Contents

Introduce

Today, we live in a world that values spontaneity and impulsiveness, highlighted by some of the advertisements and slogans that we see on television. For years, a famous shoe company has urged people to “just do it.” Advertisers know that if they can make something look attractive enough or portray it as functional enough, many people will impulsively buy it. For any of us who have ever gone into a grocery store hungry, we know all-too-well about impulsive buying because the packaging looks enticing. When we shop hungry, our eyes tend to guide most of our choices, so we fill our carts with items that look appealing—and most frequently this constitutes junk food high in sugar, fats, and carbohydrates. On the contrary, when we make a list of items and shop on a full stomach, we typically make healthier choices as well as we tend not to buy as much food that we will eventually waste. Therefore, both our waistlines and our bank accounts pay a hefty price for our impulse shopping.



Similarly, shopping at stores that cater to our passions can also lead to impulsiveness where we buy things not because we need them, but simply because we want them or they appeal to our sense of adventure. For those who love crafts and artsy hobbies, carts can overflow with items that *might* be used for future projects—to only find their way to a closet never to see daylight again. For those who love hunting and sports, a trip to the sporting goods store can turn into an adventure where multiple

Introduce

items are purchased that one may already have in storage. For others it may be a trip to the electronic or hardware store for the latest and greatest gadgets—even though what we already have works perfectly well. Inundated by a culture of impulsiveness, we tend to make choices on a whim according to how we feel and what best suits our situation at the time—not reasonable thinking which comes from and is directed by the Lord.

Certainly, indulging our impulses can be fun and exciting, but they still have consequences—especially if we don't evaluate what we do and why we are doing it. In [Judges 11](#), Israel asked Jephthah to lead them in a war against the Ammonites which he enthusiastically accepted. After all human mediation failed between the nations, Jephthah turned to the Lord and attempted to gain favor from Him, ensuring his success over the Ammonites in battle. Typically, secular worshipers at that time would offer sacrifices to their god to curry his favor; following this secular thinking, Jephthah impulsively declared that the first thing that came out of his door he would sacrifice to the Lord—and that happened to be his only daughter. By bowing to the customs of that time and making an impulsive declaration not knowing what would come out of his door, Jephthah made a tragic and sinful mistake. As believers, we must be transformed from this type of impulsiveness to having a sensible mind in Christ.

Key Question

How do you see impulsiveness in our society, in particular the church?

CONFLICT ROOTED IN IMPULSIVENESS:

This chapter begins not with a response by God to the people's question posed in [10:18](#), "who is the man who will begin the fight," but it commences with a man by the name of **Gilead** who impulsively succumbs to his sexual desires (v. 1). After he visited an unnamed prostitute, she conceived and gave birth to a son named **Jephthah**. Yet, **Gilead** also fathered other sons through his legal wife which created conflict and animosity with their half-brother **Jephthah**—all rooted in their father's impulsive gratification of his desires and their greed (v. 2). Because they considered their half-brother illegitimate, they denied him **inheritance in their father's house**, so as they **grew older** they **drove** him out of the land. This brief introduction, therefore, clearly shows how the sin which stems from being impulsive not only affects the one who commits the act, but it also affects other people around them; although individuals are responsible for their own choices, the sinful choices that people make can still influence and affect others.

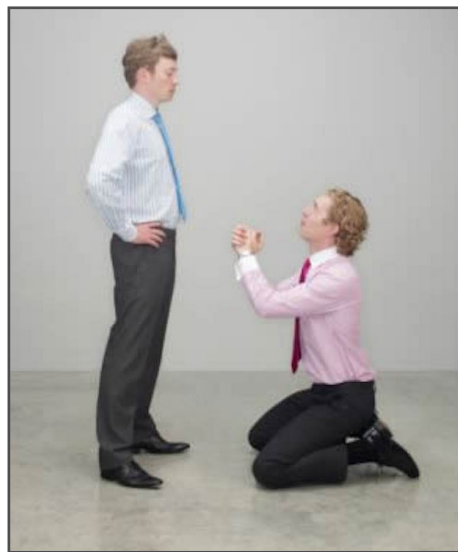
In what ways can acting upon sinful impulses have an effect on others?

Question
1

After being expelled from his homeland, **Jephthah** turned to a life of crime by joining a band of **worthless men** who **raided** and robbed people (v. 3). Meanwhile, the Ammonites waged **war** on **Israel**, but the children of **Israel** had no one skillful enough to lead them to respond effectively—so **the elders** approached the jilted and ousted **Jephthah** to lead them (vv. 4-5). Based on his reputation as a **mighty man of valor** and his prowess

Instruct

of leading a marauding band of thugs, they asked him to be their **commander** and **fight against** the Ammonites (v. 6). One can almost hear **Jephthah** cynically laughing as he responds to their request; he quips, “**You hate me and expelled me from my father’s house**”—and now you want me to help you in your time of **distress** (v. 7). He continues to ask them sarcastically, “**Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?**” In other words, through this rhetorical question, he chastises them for only coming when they need help, but he also recognizes that he can exploit the situation and take advantage of them because he proverbially has them between a rock and a hard place. Because of their desperate need and seemingly hopeless situation, **the elders** tried to reason with **Jephthah** and appeal to his sense of greed and thirst for power. Once again, they relate to him the urgency of their need, but they acknowledge that they **have turned to** him so **that** he would **go with** them and **fight** against the Ammonites (v. 8). To sweeten the deal, however, they promise to make **Jephthah** leader (i.e. **head over all** the people of **Gilead**). Because of their previous treachery, **Jephthah** responds to them with a healthy sense of skepticism by basically repeating what they have stated in a form of a question (v. 9). Yet, in his response, **Jephthah** acknowledged the role of **the Lord** in delivering the Ammonites into his hand, thereby causing **the elders** to issue an oath or pledge that if they did not fulfill promise to him the



judgment of **the Lord** would indeed befall them (v. 10). So, **Jephthah went with** them and they made him **commander-in-chief** just as they had promised there in the city of **Mizpah** (v. 11).

Impulsive behavior often leads to opportunism in which people try to seize the moment and exploit the situation. **The elders from Gilead** were opportunists because they didn't care about how they formerly viewed or treated **Jephthah**, but they merely wanted someone who could help them defeat the Ammonites no matter what the cost. Likewise, **Jephthah** was an opportunist because he disregarded the treachery that the people had done to him in order to seize the opportunity to become their leader—still risking the chance that they would revolt against him once they got what they wanted. Every Spring during storm season, we are reminded not to be hasty or impulsive in choosing construction or roofing companies if we have damage from wind or hail. Many fly-by-night companies merely seek opportunities to exploit unsuspecting victims by engaging in shoddy work, failing to guarantee their craftsmanship, or even failing to finish the job once they have received their money. Just like we ought to be careful not to fall into scams, we must turn to the Lord to protect ourselves from those who succumb to their impulses and fully rely on Him so that we don't succumb to our own.

In what ways does impulsivity lead to opportunism? What are some instances which you have seen where impulsivity has led to opportunism?

Question
2

CONCILIATION ATTEMPTED THROUGH HUMAN MEANS:

Before entering into a physical fracas with **the people of Ammon**, Jephthah attempted to broker peace through negotiations, so he **sent messengers** to **the king** and inquired why he had come to **fight against** them in their territory (v. 12). **The king** of Ammon then replied that when **Israel** had come **from Egypt** that they had taken away **the land** which rightfully belonged to them; therefore, he requested they **restore** it **peaceably** unto them (v. 13). Jephthah again **sent** his **messengers** back with a response, outlining how Israel had not in actuality taken the land that belonged to them (v. 14). Jephthah has both the Lord and history on his side to win this faulty argument proposed by **the king** of Ammon. In [Deuteronomy 2:19](#), God explicitly forbids Israel from harassing the people and taking the land of the Ammonites: "And when you come near the people of Ammon, do not harass them or meddle with them, for I will not give you any of the land of the people of Ammon as a possession, because I have given it to the descendants of Lot as a possession."

Because **the king** had clearly revised history and made an unsubstantiated claim to a land which was never theirs in the first place, the **messengers** begin by rehearsing how the Israelites showed the utmost respect for the nations by engaging in diplomacy when they came from Egypt. They **did**



not take away the land from the Moabites, Ammonites, or Edomites as **the king** had suggested (v. 15). In fact, Israel did not even violate the borders of these nations unlawfully, but stayed in **Kadesh** to seek their permission to cross their land (vv. 16-17). Therefore, they sent diplomats to both **the kings of Edom** and **Moab** to request that they be able to **pass through** their **land**, but neither **king** would **consent**. Instead of trespassing, Israel went **through the wilderness, bypassing** these nations so that they could go to the **east** and camp near **Anon** (v. 18). Thus, Jephthah and his **messengers** paint a picture of a diplomatic and peaceful Israel who respected these nations and their rights—they weren't the aggressors as the **king of Ammon** views them nor had they taken any land which rightfully belonged to his people.

What are some of the lies or inaccuracies that the culture has propagated against Christians today?

Question
3

After Israel arrived at **Anon**, they once again tried diplomacy with **the Amorites**, so that they could **pass through their land** to the land which the Lord had given them (v. 19). Yet, **Sihon, king of the Amorites**, refused to let Israel **pass** and even **gathered all** his troops to wage war **against** them (v. 20). Even then, **Sihon** and **the Amorites** were the aggressors—not Israel as the **king of Ammon** had erroneously thought. Therefore, **the Lord God of Israel delivered Sihon** into their hands and thoroughly **defeated them**, giving all their territory to the children of Israel (vv. 21-22). When dealing with a corrupt culture, we must stand on the truth of God's Word and not compromise our beliefs or actions in any way by succumbing to the false hope and teaching of the world; regardless of how the world perpetuates its lies and relentlessly attacks the truth, such

Instruct

as in the case of the **kings of Ammon** and **the Amorites**, we must remain consistent by obediently standing on and practicing the wisdom that God has given us. As we will see in the next section, God will deliver judgment upon the world because of their impetuous actions; as His servants, we must simply be available and obedient, allowing God to work through us.

How should we respond to a culture that ignores facts and revises history to support their claims?

Question
4

Judges 11:23-28

CONFIDENCE PLACED IN THE LORD:

The **messengers** then reiterated how the Lord **dispossessed** the land of the Amorites—not the land of the people of Ammon (v. 23). When they ask the rhetorical question **should you then possess it**, really they are asking why they are attempting to take land that's not theirs—especially because **the Lord God** had given it to them rightfully. The emphasis here, therefore, lies upon the action of the **Lord God**; He is the One who acted to deliver Israel, He is the One who defeated and judged the Amorites, and He is the One who gave Israel the territory on which they now reside—the people of Ammon have no claim to the land which the Lord gave to Israel. Our confidence,



therefore, should be placed in the Lord; human mediation may fail, but the Lord will never fail to do that which is right and just. To reinforce this idea, they pit the Lord against their **god Chemosh** which demonstrates how utterly powerless and foolish they would be to oppose the God of Israel (v. 24). In the previous chapter, God had told the Israelites to cry out to the gods for which they had rejected Him ([Judg 10:14](#)); these gods had no power to respond. In the same way, they basically tell the Ammonites they ought to be satisfied with their own land rather than seeking Israel's because their god is powerless to take possession of the land which the Lord God had given them.

In what areas in your life have you placed confidence in yourself rather than in God? How did it turn out?

Question
5

Next, the messengers question the king of Ammon's motives by attacking his wanton greediness by comparing him to **Balak, king of Moab** (v. 25). In essence, they question whether he sees himself as superior to **Balak** because **the king of Moab** never fought **against Israel** nor did he ever attempt to take the land that the Lord had rightfully given them. The king of Ammon, therefore, is not superior in the eyes of the rest of the nations, but merely greedy because he wanted the land for himself. In addition, the messengers also question the king's timing in an attempt to settle this dispute by charging Israel with unlawfully taking the Ammonites' land. Israel had **dwelt** in **Heshbon, Aroer, and along the banks of the Arnon** for **three hundred years** already—and *only now* the king is disputing their rightful possession. Their statute of limitations in filing a legal grievance, so to speak, has run out. Therefore, they asked, "**Why did you not recover**

Instruct

them within that time?”—in other words, why did they wait so long to seek restitution to settle this matter if they had a legal claim to the land?

The discussion concludes with an announcement of guilt and pronouncement of judgment if the Ammonites **did not heed** the warning and leave the land, ending the quarrel. Neither Jephthah nor Israel has **sinned against** them, but rather the Ammonites **have wronged** them by **fighting against** them (v. 27). Consequently, **the messengers** note that **the Lord will render judgment** against them and will ultimately settle this dispute once and for all. Despite this call to cease and desist, **the people of Ammon did not** listen to those whom **Jephthah sent**, precipitating a response from the Lord (v. 28). As believers, therefore, we must exercise caution in discerning people’s motives and distinguishing sinful actions from those which are righteous; hence, we must differentiate and declare right from wrong, but the admission of guilt and sentencing belongs only to the Lord; we should not seek to condemn or punish the wrongdoers for their actions. Although God has granted the responsibility of determining just punishments to the government, ultimately He is the Judge and He alone will issue the verdict—either not guilty because we have a relationship through Christ or guilty because we have rejected Him. Therefore, as believers, we are bound to tell the truth and differentiate right from wrong, but in the end God will have the final say and will judge those without Christ according to their deeds.

Why should we let God judge others? What other verses in Scripture speak about allowing God to pass judgment on others?

Question
6

CONSEQUENCES RESULTING FROM IMPULSIVENESS:

The last section of this text begins on a positive note with **the Spirit of the Lord** coming **upon Jephthah** and empowering him to travel throughout Israel, recruiting others to join the battle against the Ammonites (v. 29); however, the joy of responding to the Lord quickly turns to tragedy because Jephthah makes an impulsive and foolish **vow to the Lord** (v. 30). The nature of this foolish **vow** serves to highlight the consequences of acting impulsively like the world. Jephthah doesn't need to make a **vow to the Lord** because He has already been empowered and will be victorious over the Ammonites, but he foolishly follows the customs of the culture around him by attempting to bribe and bargain with the Lord so that he could gain favor for success.

Why do we not need to bribe or bargain with the Lord if we are doing His will?

Question
7

The heinous and despicable nature of this attempt at bribery shows how thoroughly corrupted by the culture Jephthah had become. Impulsively, he declares that if God would **deliver** the Ammonites to him then he would **offer as a burnt offering whatever comes out of the doors to his house to meet him upon his return** from battle (vv. 30-31). Obviously, Jephthah knows it will be some type of human sacrifice since a person would come from inside his lodging and animals typically did not dwell in tents. Despite this impulsive declaration by



Instruct

Jephthah, the Lord still helped him to **fight against** the Ammonites and **delivered them into his hands** (v. 32). Through Jephthah, the Lord completely routed this nation—here described as a **very great slaughter**—and once again graciously and mercifully delivered His people from the hand of a foreign oppressor.

After successfully returning from battle, **his only child**, a **daughter**, jubilantly comes out to greet him with **timbrels** and **dancing** (v. 34). At this point, Jephthah became very grieved not because he had to perform a human sacrifice, but because it was **his only child** and now he had no one to carry on his lineage (v. 35). Therefore, he actually blames her even though she has done what is right to come and greet him; he declares that she is the one who has **brought** him **very low** (i.e. demoralized him) and she is the one who has **troubled** him because he cannot renounce his **vow to the Lord**. The word translated **trouble** in this context signifies Jephthah's ruination: his daughter, not his ignorant **vow**, is responsible for his downfall because he has no heirs at all now.* He's not depressed and upset about the impulsiveness and foolishness of his **vow**, but just the fact that it was **his only child**.

In Reference



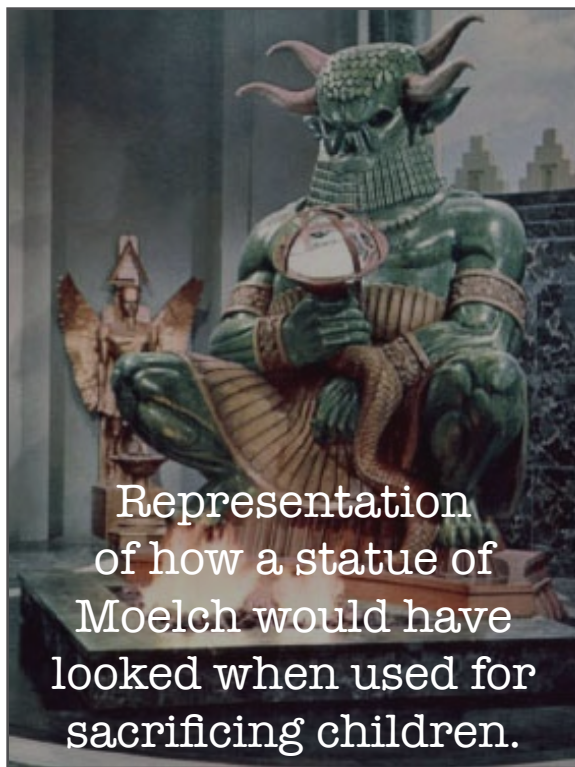
For more information, Daniel I. Block, Judges, Ruth, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999), p. 372-373.

What are some of the consequences of our impulsive actions?

Question
8

Unlike her father, the **daughter** tries to do what *she thinks is right*, so she tells him to go ahead and do **this thing** (i.e. sacrificing her as a burnt offering) since he **has given the Lord** his **word** (vv. 36-37). She only has one request: that her father give her a period of **two months** so that she and her **friends** may **go to the mountains** and grieve over her **virginity**. After these **two months**, she returned and Jephthah **carried out his vow** and sacrificed her, leaving her a virgin and him without an heir (vv. 38-39). The chapter closes by describing how it had become customary in Israel for her daughters to gather every year for **four days** to **lament** the death of Jephthah's daughter (v. 40).

Although God remains curiously silent upon this abhorrent sacrifice, He needs to say nothing because His Word has already declared His disdain for this very thing. Twice in the Law, God forbids human, and in particular child, sacrifices. In [Leviticus 18:21](#), the Law reads: "And you shall not let any of your descendants pass through the fire to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the Lord." In other words, they are not to offer any of their descendants to Moelch or any other god as a burnt offering—which no matter who would have come out of the doors to Jephthah's home he would have violated this principle. Again, in [Deuteronomy 12:31](#), the Lord explains that Israel should not follow the abhorrent



Representation of how a statue of Moelch would have looked when used for sacrificing children.

Instruct

customs of the cultures around them, specifically because they offer their children as sacrifices: “For every abomination to the Lord which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.”

Even though he made a **vow**, Jephthah has no excuse for violating the Word of the Lord; God never contradicts His Word and His Word never changes according to cultural practices at the time. It wasn't as if Jephthah had no recourse to alter his actions. He simply could have acknowledged his sinful mistake and asked the Lord for forgiveness despite his impulsiveness and foolishness. In [Leviticus 27:1-8](#), the Law also makes concession for those who break vows by fining them certain amounts of money depending upon their situation. God knows we will make mistakes and choose to sin; He is gracious to forgive if we will only turn to Him. Although we should never make vows to the Lord flippantly, we always have hope in Him to amend our actions and transform us to a life of sensibility based on Scripture. Jephthah, however, seemed to violate God's Word because he valued the customs of the culture and a cultural understanding of “god” more than his personal relationship with the Lord. If we have ever been impulsive or acted foolishly, there is still hope; all we must do is allow the Lord to transform us from impulsiveness to sensibility by studying and applying the Word which He has given us in the Bible.

What remedy do we have for our actions if we have been impulsive?

Question
9

As we saw in the introduction, impulse shopping occurs frequently when we go into a store without a plan or list. Even if we have others with us, they may succumb to the same temptation or even encourage us to give in to our desires if they are not well-grounded or disciplined. We may lament that no cure for impulsiveness exists as long as we live in this world; we may be like the culture around us and simply say, “We can’t help ourselves.” Moments of weakness when we indulge our impulsive desires can lead to a life-time of regret and failure. Yet, in Christ, we can still have hope to overcome such impulsiveness and live with sensibility. God has given us some very practical ways to overcome such impulsiveness. In order to overcome impulsive desires, we must know Scripture and allow the Holy Spirit to conform our actions accordingly. Jephthah, for example, either did not know Scripture or intentionally decided to violate what God had already specifically said. When we know and apply Scripture in our lives, we can formulate a plan. The best way to combat impulsiveness is to have a plan of action prior to facing tempting situations—just like when we go into the store and have a list; we shouldn’t deviate from that list or plan, but stick to it. In order to have a plan, we must pray and ask God to grant us wisdom—which He will do generously ([James 1:5](#)). Without wisdom from the Lord, we will tend to follow the foolishness of the culture around us. Finally, we ought to be accountable to the Lord, but also have family and friends who are spiritually mature and can help us stay on course by encouraging us to do right and correcting us when we do wrong. When we follow these principles according to God’s will, He will indeed transform us from impulsive to sensible.

Incorporate

How have you ever acted impulsively in your life? What was the outcome of your actions? How did it create hardship in your life?

How did Christ help you to overcome this impulsiveness? If there are still areas in your life in which you are impulsive, pray and ask God to deliver you from them.

According to Scripture, in what ways are we to exercise sensibility in our lives?

For Ministry Info and Ways to Get Involved:

To see Ministry Opportunities go to:

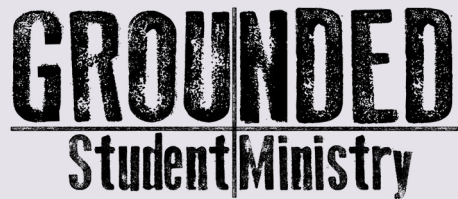
mymember.fbcfw.org

Children's Ministry
Birth - 6th Grade



kaz.fbcfw.org

Student Ministry
7th - 12th Grade



students.fbcfw.org

Men's Ministry



men.fbcfw.org

Women's Ministry



women.fbcfw.org

Adult Ministry



adults.fbcfw.org

Worship Ministry



worship.fbcfw.org

Stay Informed!



events.fbcfw.org

Legacy Adult Ministry • 55+



impact.fbcfw.org

Audio Sermons



sermons.fbcfw.org

Journal: Document God's Work

April 2018

Written and Published by
First Baptist Church of Fort Worth

For more information
or for questions
please contact
mikeneal@fbcfw.org

Interactive PDF available online at
curriculum.fbcfw.org

Visit us on the web

www.fbcfw.org



[@FBCFW](https://twitter.com/FBCFW)



[facebook.com/
FirstBaptistFortWorth](https://facebook.com/FirstBaptistFortWorth)

FBCFW • 5001 NE Loop 820 • Fort Worth, TX • 76137
(817) 485-7711 • info@fbcfw.org