

## Lesson 10: The Downward Spiral

Scripture: Selections from Judges 19-21

### ICEBREAKER:

Share a time when you said or did something you thought was no big deal, and how it spiraled into something big.

### REVIEW/OVERVIEW:

- What was your overall opinion on the Book of Judges?
- Which of our stories in Judges did you connect with the best? Why?
- Which story did you struggle with the most?
- What is something God has taught you through our journey in Judges?
- How has our time in The Cycle helped you understand our sinfulness and God's grace?

**Disclaimer:** The final chapters of Judges contain extremely disturbing stories of sexual abuse, murder, war, and destruction. "By modern standards, it is deeply repulsive—and it was by ancient Israelite standards too, going down in Israel's history as an episode of great shame" (Judges For You, page 181). The story begins with one man's sexual immorality and spirals into mass destruction and civil war. Take caution as you read this story, not only of the graphic nature describes, but also the ease in which any of us can allow our own private sin to lead us and others into ruin.

### THE END BEGINS:

Read Judges 19:1-10

- What is your impression of the Levite, his concubine, and her father?
- What does this say about the spiritual and moral failings of the people of Israel?
- How does this set the stage for the downward spiral over the next few chapters?

Read **My Woman, My Property**, pages 182-183, in *Judges For You*.

- How does this change your impression of the Levite, his concubine, and her father?
- Keller suggests that both the Levite and her father treat the concubine as an object. What are some examples of this? How might that be a metaphor for their relationship with God?

Read Judges 19:16-21

The Levite, his concubine and his servant being to make their way home, avoiding Canaanite cities, and find hospitality from an old man who invites them to stay at his home.

- Where does the Levite say he is heading? Does that disturb you, based on the purpose of his journey?
- Why do you think the old man suggest they stay at his place and not the town square?
- What might he know that this group of weary travelers might not?

Read Judges 19: 22-28 (Warning: includes disturbing images)

- Who shows up at the old man's home and what do they demand?
- What does the man offer as an alternative to their demands?
- What does this say about the old man, the area they lived, and their view of women?

What started out as a Levite's sexual sin, has begun to turn into something tremendously worse. It is disturbing to find stories like this in the inspired word of God. What might God be trying to teach us through this story?

IN *Judges For You*, read the first two paragraphs on page 184 (**Don't Do That Disgraceful Thing**) and **Israel's Sodom**, pages 184-185.

- How does this story compare/contrast to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:1-11)
- How does this help illustrate the downward spiral into immorality and idolatry of the Israelite people?

This story only gets worse. Read Judges 19:29-30 (includes disturbing images)

- What does the Levite do?
- Why do you think he does this? What does he hope it will accomplish?
- How do the people of Israel respond to the disturbing delivery?

Read the final paragraph in **There Was No Answer**, the middle of page 186, for additional insight into this part of the story. How does Keller's insights impact the answers to the previous questions?

Read Judges 20:1-3, 8-14 (verse 4-7 recap the previous chapter)

- How do things progress in the downward spiral of this story?
- Why do things escalate into civil war between the tribe of Benjamin and the rest of the Israelites?
- How does the downward spiral of sin cause division and strife in our lives and in our world?

Read *How Do We React?*, pages 187-188, in *Judges For You*.

- After studying this story, what does Keller suggest our reaction should be? Why?
- He says that we can find ourselves in this story. Do you see yourself? How?
- What warnings might we find for the modern church in this 3000 year old story?

#### **THE REST OF THE STORY:**

In Judges 20 & 21 we see violence, death, massacre, war, dishonesty, slavery, and tragedy. We see how sin builds on top of sin, leaving many people damaged in its wake.

Keller writes, *"These chapters are a picture of how societies not centered on God must function: worshiping something other than the true God; deciding what seems right, logical and reasonable in their own eyes; wondering why things never seem to go much better; and then deciding that God, if he exists, cannot much care for people."* (page 194)

**SERMON DISCUSSION:** The final chapters of Judges leave us uncertain and unsettled, wondering what is the point of this whole book?

- What are some things you learned through this week's sermon?
- What are some questions you have or items you were confused about?
- What is your impression of the downward spiral based on the sermon?
- How did this week's sermon help you understand the cycle of sin and redemption in the people of Israel?
- What did you learn about the cycle of sin and redemption in your life?

**THE BEGINNING AND THE END:** Read Judges 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25

The beginning of most cycles began with these words, "The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD" (Judges 3:7, et al), reminding us of the continual failure of the people of Israel. The final verse of this book reads, "In those days Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

- What do these verses say about the perspective of right and wrong, good and evil?
- How does what was seen in the eyes of the Lord, compare to what is seen in our own eyes?
- What does this say about the human condition, then and now?

Read **Whose Eyes Matter**, pages 124-125, in *Judges For You*.

- What does Keller say about the way God sees things and the way we perceive them (the eyes of the Lord vs our own eyes?)
- How has this idea of spiritual perspective been seen throughout our study of Judges?
- What does Keller say about sin and our perception? How does our perception misconstrue our understanding of the world and our need for a savior, judges, and king?

**QUOTE:** “No other book in the Old Testament offers the modern church as telling a mirror as this book. This book is a wake-up call for a church moribund in its own selfish pursuits. Instead of heeding the call of truly godly leaders and letting Jesus Christ be Lord of the church, everywhere congregations and their leaders do what is right in their own eyes.” (Daniel I. Block, *Judges-Ruth*, page 586)

Read **The King We Need**, pages 195-196, in *Judges For You*.

- How does Israel’s lack of king point us to our own human depravity and the need for a king that is greater than us?
- How does it help us understand our desperate need for Jesus?
- The early readers of Judges would not have understood the depth of God’s grace that we discover once we understand our need for Jesus and his triumphant work on the cross?
- How have you seen Jesus in the stories we have looked at?

**PERSONAL REFLECTION:** Invite group members to share their personal reflections on Judges and how it may help them grow in faith and practice.

- If you had to take one personal theme from Judges and apply it to your life, what would it be?
- How has our study of Judges helped you grow in faith?
- What is one way it has challenge you in how you practice your faith and how might it reshape your life?

**Share:** What are ways that the group can continue to support and encourage each other in their spiritual walk?

**Close in prayer**

**Thank you all for being a part of this journey together. I know it was difficult at times, but I do how it was also rewarding. I hope that God used the lessons from Judges as a reminder of his amazing grace. I pray that the small group experience has helped you connect with God and others through community. I stand behind small groups and believe they are an essential element in building meaning through Christian community.**