

Re-Cycling Judges
“The Best of Both Worlds?”
Judges 2:10-19
6.24.18



Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context... (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

“What mental images are created for you when you hear the word ‘idolatry’? Why does it sound like such an antiquated concept?”

“Why do you think that the Bible seems to offer idolatry, not simply as one sin amongst many, but as the ‘primary’ sin? In what ways might idolatry be masking a deeper issue of the heart?”

“How might we actually make idols out of ‘good’ things? Do you think these idols are more difficult to acknowledge, because of their favorable appearance?”

“What are some things that you believe all idols have in common? What are some helpful ways of identifying whether or not something/someone has become an idol for you?”

“Why do you believe it becomes so difficult for us as Christians to live uniquely in the culture without adopting some of its values and ethics?”

Teaching Notes...

“A healthy, emerging relationship with God will always result in a greater awareness of your own brokenness and need to be made right which will, in turn, develop in you a lingering appreciation for God’s love for you and a desire to give yourself to him completely--- considering no other options.”

Context (review from Introduction)

~ Judges: set somewhere around the 13th century, B.C., *“After the death of Joshua...”*

~ Spans a period of about (350) years, approximately one-fourth of the history offered to us in the OT.

~ Israel has been distinguished as the covenant partners of God whom he would bless and would use to bless the world.

It's a story of a people in transition; a people who were now "free" but struggled to "live freely". It's about a people who were living amidst competing stories. Stories which, at many points, were in conflict.

They were stories which helped people understand their world; understand themselves. Stories which helped them answer the deeper, more meaningful questions in life: *"Who am I? Where am I? Why am I?"*

The people of God were always intended to function in ways that both distinguished God, and themselves. God's glory--- reflected in us--- pointing back to God.

They would not be distinguished simply because they made claims on another (a different) God, but that their lives were distinguishable in the ordinariness of their everyday lives: their jobs, their relationships, their community, their ability to rest. They were **"holy"** (set apart).

They **"were"** holy by virtue of the fact that God had chosen them. It had nothing to do with any glaring qualities that made them the obvious favorite. It was because God chose them that they were chosen (Deuteronomy 7). They **"were to be holy"** as a reflection of their understanding of their identity.

Without such a clear and defining Story, we become open to suggestions. Your soul already knows this. The gospel is simply an attempt to portray or describe it (put words to it) in meaningful ways. It's why the Spirit is able to make that deeper connection before you are able to articulate it. "Convincing" (John 16). *"Yeah, that's it!"*

It's hard to live uniquely (Romans 12).

It has proven difficult for us, as God's people, to maintain our distinctiveness without becoming distanced and self-righteous.

It has proven challenging to live in and amongst a culture which, in many ways, lives in direct conflict with Godly values and priorities, and not become cynical and uncaring.

It's difficult to live in our culture without, at times, either knowingly or unwittingly adopting its values and practices which diminish our witness.

Flannery O'Connor...

"It takes great courage to read a great story."

As we consider the events recorded in Judges, we have to ‘*sit up straight*’, look God in the eye when he’s talking to us. We have to summons the courage to look below the surface of our lives and confess not only that we have been wounded, but that we have, at times, victimized others, as well.

There’s a phrase which litters the text: “*Again, the Israelites did evil...*” **You can almost hear the exasperation in the writer’s voice, can’t you?**

Genesis gets us off to a “good start”. It centers us in the creative, generative love of God. It establishes “blessing” as the framework for all of life. It creates context for understanding our world, ourselves, our God. It’s home.

It is “*good*”, but suspicion called it all into question. Our questioning hampered our ability to trust. The absence of trust resulted in alienation. People alienated (disconnected) from life--- from truth, from wisdom--- make some really sincere, albeit self-destructive choices.

Our hearts were created ‘sacred-space’; for singleness; for devotion.

Wisdom literature speaks of the heart as that place within us that organizes (directs) all of our lives. The word is used over (900) times in the Bible. The heart is best understood as the “**center**” of our being. It’s essentially “**who we are**”. It is the place from which we think and understand and make determinations. It is the seat of our passions. It’s all that makes us ‘personal’: able to respond... to God, others, and the world around us.

There is, repeatedly, throughout the Story, this direct-link between our heart and the life that it produces.

Luke 6:45 “*A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart.*”

The human heart was designed to attach itself to God; to take root and establish itself in our identity and meaning as image-bearing creation. The heart never escapes the tension of compartmentalization or competing affections.

1 John 5:21 “*Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.*” (“...*keep away from anything that might take God’s place in your hearts.*” NLT)

The Bible alerts us early and often to these tendencies we have to seek fulfillment in something other than God; to find in the “created” something assigned to the “Creator”.

John is saying that this is life’s most basic question: “**Has something other than God captured your heart and earned your trust?**”

Idolatry is not listed as one sin among a laundry-list of God-infractions, but is typically spoken of as “the” sin which gives rise to all our creative-expressions.

The Bible adopts a number of images in order to depict God’s relationship with his people (e.g. as their faithful King, as their shepherd, as a deliverer, etc.). Most commonly is the imagery of marriage: the idea that Israel is married to God. This relationship has been turbulent, at best. We’re not good at fidelity. We struggle with exclusivity, but God has proven to be the faithful and jealous husband.

*“Then the sons of Israel did **the** evil in the sight of the Lord.” (11)*

One scholar says that the Hebrews reads, “*the evil*”. It doesn’t just say that they committed a bunch of God-violations, but that they committed “*the*” sin. What was “*the*” sin? They ‘*abandoned*’ (lit. ‘neglected; deserted; set free’... ironic)

Idolatry is to displace the love of God as central to our significance and security. Quite honestly, we all practice some form of it.

Few of us would imagine ourselves dancing in some mood-altering stupor around backyard images we had carved out with our chain-saw, but we would have the tendency to attach our hearts to things which we rather naively believe will offer us the fulfillment that our hearts desire.

Idols...

... all inevitably provoke worship. We always make sacrifices to/for our idols.

Our idols always get the “best of us”: the best of our time, our attention, our schedule, our budget. We give up something or something of ourselves in exchange for our desire.

... make trivial things into ultimate things.

Idolatry reduces life; reduces us. It makes life “less than”. We abandon the “*artwork of God*” we are (Ephesians 2) and settle for our own paint-by-our-own-numbers expression!

... deteriorate our freedoms, then offer themselves back to us as the solutions (i.e. more money, a different sexual partner, a stronger drink, etc.)

Ask God to place within you a desire for himself that is stronger than you desire for sin. We call it the mystery of the “new heart”.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 “I will give you a new heart and I will put a new spirit within you...”

It’s not about being the same old person with a few new religious experiences. It’s about a new source of life. New desires. New impulses which are God-ward.

Until you know God as good and trust his intentions as good, you will invariably go after other gods.

The nature of our brokenness can only be measured against the vision of the good that God intends for us.

The reason that the circumstances of our world (our lives, our relationships) often seem so dramatic is because they are so contradictory to God's good purposes for us.

Know that the answer is not more rigid discipline or asceticism, but to "know" love.

To know that we are loved so stubbornly and relentlessly gives us the courage to reject other ways of finding love; other ways of attempting to discover who we are apart from God.