
WEEK 11 - TO BECOME A HOLY NATION

RECAP & PREPARATION

Daily Readings for the Week

- Joshua 22-24, Psalm 69-74
- Judges 1-15

Resources for this Week

- Video: Judges

FOCUS OF TIME TOGETHER

To watch as Israel descends into chaos and destruction as “everyone did what was right in their own eyes” and to see the similar patterns in all humanity and in our own lives.

GROUND RULE/GOAL/VALUE FOR THE WEEK

Don't be on your phone or SmartWatch. Our ground rule this week is a practical one that encourages us to be fully present with one another. Everyone put your phone in the middle of the group and focus your attention on the person sharing, the Scripture being read, and the prayers being prayed.

CONNECTION AND UNITY EXERCISE (MUTUAL INVITATION, EXPLAINED AT THE END)

Share in one minute what you are bringing into the room tonight and also what you are feeling with your phone in the middle of the room and not in your hand/pocket.

OPENING PRAYER

Have someone open your time in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to be with you as you read a particularly confounding and even disturbing portion of Scripture.

INTRO TO DISCUSSION

This week, we ended the book of Joshua and began the book of Judges – a book that is depressing, hard to read, and at times downright disturbing. It chronicles Israel's slow descent into chaos and evil as they consistently disobey and reject God in order to worship other gods. From the end of Joshua to the end of Judges, Israel goes from having successfully conquered and inherited the Promised Land and “serving the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua and had known all the work that the Lord did for Israel” (Joshua 24:31), to a nation that rejects God and becomes like the Canaanites, participating in idol worship, child sacrifice, and gang rape. Again and again, the book of Judges says “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” and describes the often brutal and horrific consequences this rejection of God, His covenant, and His way of living (the Law) has for Israel and its people. Like a virus in a zombie movie, the willful rejection of God's covenant by Israel's leaders spreads to its people and leads to carnage. The effects of this individual and systemic rejection of God's way of living culminates narratively in Judges 19, a story we will read together. It is a shocking and sickening example of just how pervasive evil was in the land by the end of the time of the judges.

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

Hermeneutic Tool for the Week:

Pay attention to the repetition and trajectory of the Scriptures, especially in narrative texts. When Judges repeats similar stories of disobedience and violence and ends with stories of shocking violence and evil, it is making a narrative point about the trajectory, severity, and consistency of Israel's actions.

Read Joshua 24:14-28 & Judges 19 aloud together.

QUESTIONS FOR BASIC UNDERSTANDING:

These questions are to help us interpret and understand the text as it was intended to be interpreted and understood.

1. Have someone recap the book of Joshua. What happened, and what were the main events and themes of the book?
2. As you read the book of Judges, what do you think the author's intent was in chronicling this era of Israel's history the way that he did?

QUESTIONS FOR LISTENING TO SCRIPTURE:

These questions are to help us be affected by Scripture in the way it was intended to affect us.

1. Were there any parts of Judges 19 that shocked, provoked, surprised, confused, disturbed, or confronted you?
2. Why do you think the author of Judges includes this violent, horrific story? What point might the author of Judges be trying to get across to his/her readers?

QUESTIONS FOR INTERACTING WITH SCRIPTURE:

These questions are to help us slow down to taste and notice Scripture, savor its richness, and meditate on its complexity of meaning.

1. Where is God in this story? If you cannot identify where God might be in this story, how does that make you feel?
2. Is it disorienting to read such a gruesome and awful story in the Bible? What questions does it bring up in you about God, Israel, human nature, or the Scriptures?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

QUESTIONS FOR SELF-EXAMINATION:

These questions are to help us look at ourselves, be aware and honest about who we are in light of our interaction with Scripture, and consider any appropriate action.

Before sharing, take a couple of minutes to sit in silence and invite the Holy Spirit to help you take an honest assessment of your day-to-day life over the past week. Ask the Holy Spirit for clarity in answering the following questions. You may find it helpful to write your answers down.

1. In what ways, specifically, can you identify with or connect to the recurring theme in Judges of the tempting and destructive power of only “doing what is right in your own eyes” with no regard for the people, community, and world around you, or even God’s notion of right and wrong? Have you seen this pattern in your own life?
2. Were there specific moments or choices you made in this past week where you chose to do what was right in your own eyes with no regard for the people, relationships, or community around you? What was appealing and/or tempting about these choices? What were the consequences of these choices?
3. Based on what the Holy Spirit brings to mind, are there any conversations you need to have, apologies you need to make, confessions you need to keep, commitments you need to make, or practices you need to implement that the Holy Spirit could be inviting you into?
4. Give everyone a space to share and confess what they feel comfortable with to the group.

CLOSING

Close your time by praying for one another.

MUTUAL INVITATION - A DISCUSSION TECHNIQUE

To practice humility and becoming aware of your tendencies in group discussions, we are going to utilize a special discussion technique. We've borrowed the exercise from Eric Law's book *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*. Law calls it "Mutual Invitation" and uses it to reveal and equalize the power dynamics that exist in groups. He finds it especially effective in multicultural communities because it helps reveal how often the white majority members perceive greater personal power within the community than do many minority members. It is very helpful in making group members aware of how they interact within the group and then also assisting them to reflect on how this affects the community. It may be useful for your group to use this discussion format on a regular basis, or you may decide just to practice it a few times as a training of sorts. Here's how it works:

- The discussion leader should let the group know approximately how much time will be allocated for this particular portion of discussion.
- Then the leader will introduce the topic or question to be discussed. This will typically come from the small group material. It is often helpful if the small group has access to the material to refer back to the question during the discussion.
- Next, the leader introduces or reminds everyone of the discussion process which is as follows: "The leader or a designated person will share first. After that person has spoken, he or she then invites another to share. Whom you invite does not need to be the person next to you. After the next person has spoken, that person is given the privilege to invite another to share. If you don't want to say anything, simply say 'pass' and proceed to invite another to share. We will do this until everyone has been invited."

Note: The first time you practice this, it will likely be very awkward. The tendency will be to give up and go back to the whoever-wants-to-talk-can-talk approach. However, persist through this to at least try it a couple times. Also, do not allow people to interrupt or speak when it is not their turn. Gently remind them that it is not their turn to speak. Similarly, if someone "passes" and chooses not to speak, do not pressure them into doing so. If a person speaks very briefly or passes and then does not remember to invite the next person to speak, do not invite for him or her. Simply point out that this person has the privilege to invite the next person to speak. By ensuring that this person still has the privilege to invite, you affirm and value that person independent of that person's verbal ability.

