



Toxic Faith

RECAP

This week's focus: "God wants relationship with us."

In Judges 10:6-12:7, we see a cycle of disobedience and deliverance in Israel's history. The Israelites again turned away from God, worshiping foreign gods. These gods keep disappointing them, yet they continue to turn to them for their deliverance. This idolatry incited God's anger, leading to their oppression by the Ammonites and the Philistines. The Israelites, realizing their sin, cry out to God for help.

The Lord responded by reminding them of their past deliverances, emphasizing that their current suffering was a result of their own actions. Despite their repentance, He initially refused to save them, urging them to seek help from the gods they had chosen. However, seeing their anguish, He compassionately responds.

God then raised up Jephthah, a warrior and outcast, to lead the Israelites. Jephthah isn't the obvious choice for Israel. He's a leader of a gang and He's the son of a prostitute. Again, God uses an unlikely candidate to free Israel from their enemies.

Jephthah's first task as their new leader is to address the territory disputes. Both the Ammonites and the Israelites believe they have a divine right to the land. Jephthah's first tactic is diplomacy. He tries to persuade the Ammonite king with logic and reason. The Ammonite king refuses to concede and war breaks out.

On his way to the battlefield, Jephthah made a significant vow to God, promising that if granted victory over the Ammonites, he would sacrifice the first thing that came out of his house upon his return. It's important to note that God doesn't ask Jephthah to vow a burnt offering to him. This is where Jephthah mixes his cultural beliefs with his understanding of God, and his faith becomes toxic. In a dramatic confrontation, Jephthah defeated the Ammonites, but tragically, his daughter was the first to greet him on his return, leading to a heartbreaking fulfillment of his vow.

Jephthah's problem is the same as Israel's - he isn't completely devoted to God to obeying His ways. If he was, he would have known that God hated human sacrifice and didn't ask for His people to make vows. Jephthah's misunderstanding of God's character brings about tragic consequences, and he loses his only daughter. But the story doesn't end with only one tragedy. Following Jephthah's victory, conflict arose with the Ephraimites, who felt slighted for not being included in the battle. Civil war breaks out between Ephraim and the Gileadites and in the end 42,000 Ephraimites die.

This tragic passage highlights the themes of sin, repentance and God's sovereignty. Judges illustrates for us that idolatry leads to enslavement which leads to more idolatry. Like Jephthah our understanding of the character of God can be clouded by sin. We pursue our significance by returning to idols that leave us empty and desperate.

The idols of our day aren't always obvious, yet we see them active in the culture and the church. We often worship the idol of self in two ways: Self-pleasure (irreligious) and Self-righteousness (religious). Both are desperate attempts to justify ourselves apart from God's grace. The irreligious leave God out completely while the religious mix God with their own works. Both lead us away from a relationship with God. The solution is found at the cross where the grace of God is available for us. *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast."* Ephesians 2:8-9.

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SHARE (5-10 min)

1. Icebreaker Question: What kinds of promises did you make to your parents or teachers growing up?

STUDY (about 30 min) Read Judges 10:6-12:7

2. How did God speak to you through the scripture and the sermon this week? Is there anything that was unclear, or that you have questions about?
3. Read Judges 10:6-9. How did Israel continue to do evil in God's eyes? What was the consequence of their lack of devotion?
4. Read Judges 10:10-16. What does it take for Israel to show true repentance? Why do you think they continue to repeat the cycle of falling away and crying out for a rescue?
5. Read Judges 10:17-11:11. Given Jephthah's background, what does it say about God's character that He is willing to use Jephthah? How does that impact your perspective of yourself and others around you?
6. Refer to Judges 11:29-40. Why do you think Jephthah made this rash vow? How did the culture around him influence him? How does the culture around you influence your perception of God's character and your relationship to Him?
7. In Jephthah's story, we see a human problem. We will pursue significance through an irreligious (self-pleasure) approach to life or through a religious (self-righteousness) approach to life. What makes these two approaches so dangerous as a believer? Which do you struggle with?
8. When life is challenging, who or what do you turn to instead of God? Who or what else fights for God's place in your life? What does it look like for you to be completely surrendered to God?

SUPPORT (15 min)

Break up into smaller prayer groups of 2 or 3. Share some of the things in your life that you are tempted to turn to instead of God. What gets in the way of your heart being fully devoted to God? After sharing, pray that God would teach you what it means to have a heart completely devoted to him.