



THE BOOK OF  
**JUDGES**

Part II | Judges 6-21

# How to be in a small group

Another year, another Bible study group. Time to sign up, turn up and get things rolling for another year. Time also perhaps to ask some questions about your small group. Do you feel as if you just go along because that's what you're expected to do? Does the group have a clear purpose, or does it just exist because it has always existed?

More to the point, what part are you going to play in this year's group? What can you be doing to make the group a success? There are many books and guides and training materials for small group leaders (like *Growth Groups* from Matthias Media), but what about the humble group member? What can each of us be doing to make the most of our small groups?

## Why go in the first place?

People go to small groups for all sorts of reasons to fulfil expectations, to make friends, to pursue romantic possibilities, to receive encouragement and counsel, to learn, and so on.

While most of these might be perfectly acceptable reasons to join a small group, the first and indispensable reason must be clear in our minds. Our primary reason for belonging to a small group is to give us opportunity to love and encourage other people in Christ. It's not about Me; it's about Them. And it's about Them because of Christ.

This after all is what the Christian life is about. Our most basic principle is to love other people as Christ has loved us, to lay down our lives for them as Christ did for us. This applies as much to small groups as it does to marriages, families, workplaces, and larger Christian meetings. We go to small groups not primarily to have our needs met, but to meet the needs of others. Of course, we have needs too, and no doubt they will be met along the way—but we can let others worry about that. In fact, paradoxically, the more we focus on loving others, and doing whatever we can for them, the more encouragement and strength we find ourselves.

There are many ways we can love and encourage the other people in our groups. Here are five powerful ones (complete with alliterative titles).

## 1. The power of presence

This is the simplest and most obvious, but is no less powerful for being so. Just being there each week without fail is a powerful encouragement to the other members of the group. In making the group time a solid commitment, to be missed only in times of emergency, you send a very clear message to the other members: "Being with you matters very much to me. Unless something very important comes up, you can expect me. Encouraging you is a top priority."

Conversely, inconsistent attendance sends a somewhat less encouraging message: "I don't mind coming, but it's not that important. If I feel a bit tired or something else crops up, don't expect me. Being with you and encouraging you isn't really a very high priority for me."

Turning up regularly requires no extraordinary gifts or talent, but it is a powerful way of loving other people.

## 2. The power of preparation

Most small groups complete their evening's Bible study with a plaintive plea from the leader for people to read the passage and prepare for next week's study. The leader knows full well that most people won't, but there's no harm in trying!

However, preparing for the group time is another powerful way to love the members of the group. Of course, having read the

passage, or done the homework, greatly increases the benefit you yourself receive from the discussion. More importantly, however, it equips you to encourage others by what you say. Rather than throwing in whatever occurs to you at the time, you have actually thought about the Bible passage and the issues that it raises. You are much better prepared to say things that stimulate and encourage and teach others if you have bothered to give it some thought beforehand.

## 3. The power of prayer

Paul's friend and fellow worker, Epaphras, would have made an ideal small group member. According to Paul, he was always "wrestling in prayer" for the Colossians, that they might "stand firm in all the will of God". Paul was able to vouch that in doing so, Epaphras was "working hard for you" (Col 4:12-13).

Praying for others is hard work, but real work. It is one of the most loving things we can do for our fellow group members, not only because it is through our prayers that God does his work in people's lives, but because it is such a quiet, inconspicuous form of ministry. Making a casserole for someone, by comparison, is much more satisfying—you see something very tangible for your efforts, and you have the pleasure of delivering it to the person and receiving their warm expressions of thanks. Prayer has none of those rewards. You do it for one reason only: that you care for that person and want what is best for them in Christ. And so you pray for them.

## 4. The power of personality

The alliteration may be starting to stretch a little thin here, but the point is solid enough—that a powerful way of loving others in your small group is to be willing to share your own life and personality with them.

This is by no means an easy thing to do. Many of us would much rather keep quiet and not give too much away. However, by opening up and sharing our lives and thoughts and struggles and joys, we do others a great service. We not only show them that we have the very same struggles that they have (but thought they were alone in suffering); we also encourage them to open up as well.

Of course, it is anything but loving to indiscriminately dump everything we are thinking or feeling onto the group. We need to heed the advice of Proverbs and think carefully before we speak; as well as the words of Ephesians 4: "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (Eph 4:29).

## 5. The power of love

Whatever you do in the group—every word you say, every action—do it for the sake of others. Look for how you can support and help the leader. Look for ways to care for the members of the group—those who could really do with a phone call or visit; those who would benefit from having someone to pray or read the Bible with; those who need financial or other material help; those who just need a friend to have pizza and a video with.

Belonging to a small group can be a very demanding exercise. It can cost us our lives, because that is what it means to be a follower of Christ—to lay down our lives for the sake of others. If we grasp the possibilities, small groups represent an enormously fruitful opportunity for doing just that.

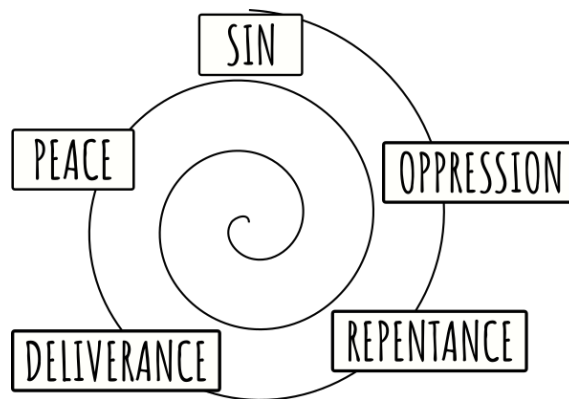


# INTRODUCTION

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**The intention of the Book of Judges is to make us long for Jesus.** After Joshua led God's people into the Promised Land he reminded them that they were to be faithful to their covenant promises to God by obeying his words. By doing so, they would show the whole world what God was like. The book of Joshua ends with Israel's enthusiastic agreement to do this. The book of Judges begins with the death of Joshua, and tells of Israel's complete and utter failure to do what they had promised they would.

**The name of the book** comes from the type of leaders Israel had. Before Israel had kings, they were governed by Judges. These judges were not courtroom judges, but more like regional military leaders.



Judges 2.11-23 describes the pattern of the whole book of Judges.

The book of Judges comes with a warning: it's very disturbing and violent. It tells a tragic tale of Israel's corruption and evil, and how they end up no different than the world around them that doesn't know God. It's quite shocking, and that's the point. It shows how desperately Israel needs a better leader, someone who can break the cycle of sin, a righteous king—so as to be saved from themselves.

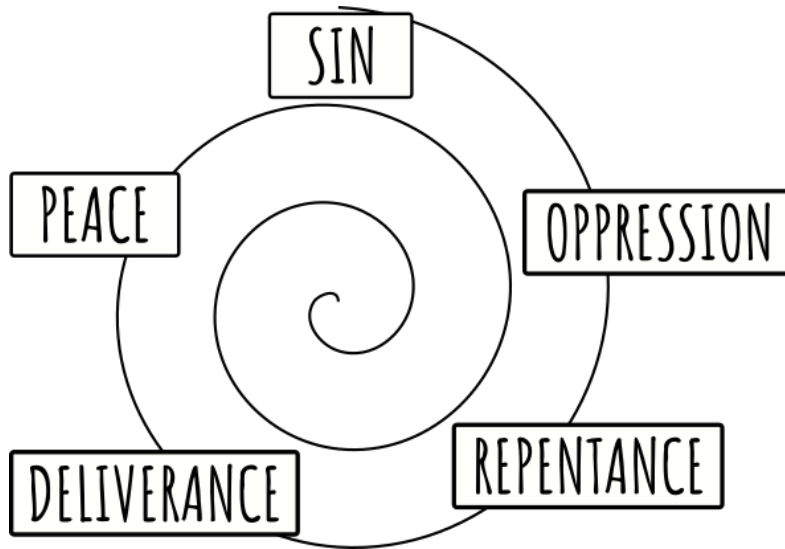
**The structure** of the book of Judges

- Judges 1.1-3.6
  - Israel fails to drive the Canaanites and their false gods out of the land, and the Canaanites become a snare to them, turning them away from the true God.
- Judges 3.7-16.31
  - God graciously sends Judges to save Israel. But these Judges are deeply flawed, and go from bad to worse.
- Judges 17.1-21.25
  - The final section shows how ungodly and horrifically evil Israel has become, following their poor start to it's natural conclusion—a dismal end.

The sections covering each episode in the second half of Judges are quite long, so your group may benefit from reading the chapters in advance each week. The *Preparation Page* will help you do this.

**READ JUDGES 6.1-8.28**

Note where the events of this section match up with the pattern of the book of Judges.



Do the main characters lead God's people well, or badly?

What does God do?

Pray, thanking God for Jesus' perfect rule and rescue.

STUDY 1  
**JUDGES 6.1-8.28**

When do you feel weak?

**READ JUDGES 6**

What trouble is Israel in (6.1-6), and why (6.7-10)?

Gideon is a complex character! When is he fearful? When is he faithful? (Hints: God's responses to Gideon help show us Gideon's heart, and sometimes Gideon is both fearful and faithful at the same time!)

How does God graciously get to the heart of Israel's problem?

**READ JUDGES 7**

What reason does God give for reducing the size of Gideon's army?

How does the 'battle' play out?

Judges 7 is an unmistakable lesson that God saves us, and we don't save ourselves. How has this truth been a reassurance to you recently?

## READ JUDGES 8

What does Gideon do (8.4-21) and what is his motivation for doing it (8.19)?

How does the chapter end for Gideon and for Israel?

Do you recall the pattern of the book of Judges? See if you can draw it. Does this part of Judges follow the pattern?

## THINK IT OVER

The Old Testament is all about God—what he is like, and his attitude to his people. What do we learn about God here?

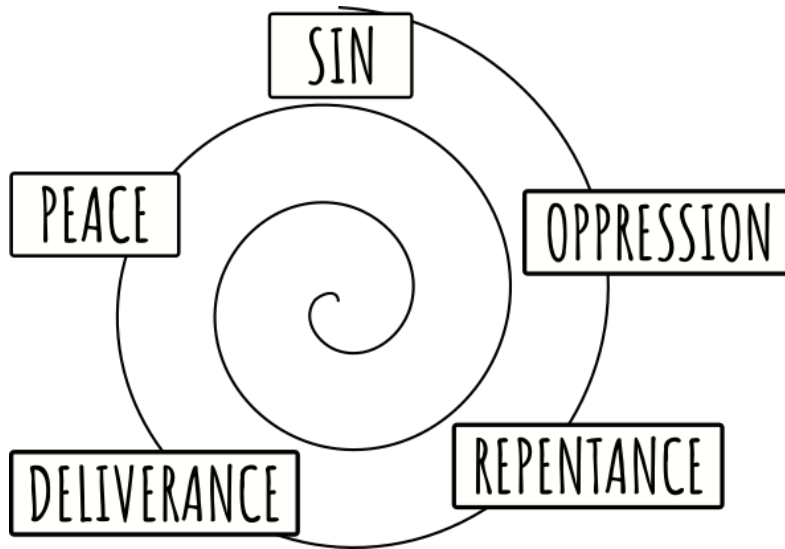
The Book of Judges makes us long for Jesus. How does this part in particular help us appreciate Jesus?

Why do you think it is so important to God that we know we cannot save ourselves?

Are there times in your life when (like Gideon and Israel) you have been fearful of obeying God? What about times when you are prone to sin and disobedience? How does this weakness help you see clearly that it is God who saves?

**READ JUDGES 8.29-9.57**

Note where the events of this section match up with the pattern of the book of Judges.



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STUDY 2

# JUDGES 8.29-9.57

Ever had someone on your team who was so hopelessly incompetent that they made a complete mess and it was a relief when they were gone? Chances are they were a pleasure compared to Abimelech...

## READ JUDGES 8.29-35

Remember Gideon was given the nickname Jerub-baal back in Judges 6.31-32, which means *Let Baal contend*.

What do the people of Israel do when Gideon dies (8.33)? How does this description compare to previous parts of the pattern of Judges (cf. 3.7, 3.12, 4.1, and 6.1)?

How does Israel treat God?

How does Israel treat Gideon's family?

## READ JUDGES 9.1-21

A surprising thing happens in Judges chapter 9. At this point in the pattern, we expect a judge to arrive to save Israel. But this time we don't get one! Instead, we get an **anti-judge**. Abimelech is everything a leader of Israel *shouldn't* be...

How is Abimelech's attitude different to his father's attitude (cf. Judges 8.22-23)?

How is Abimelech's rise to power (9.1-6) fundamentally different to all the leaders of Israel we've read about so far?



What is the point of Jotham's parable?

## **READ JUDGES 9.22-57**

What does God do?

How do the leaders of Shechem die? How is this poetic justice? (cf. 9.3-5)?

How does Abimelech die? How is this poetic justice? (cf. 9.18)?

What has God achieved?

## **THINK IT OVER**

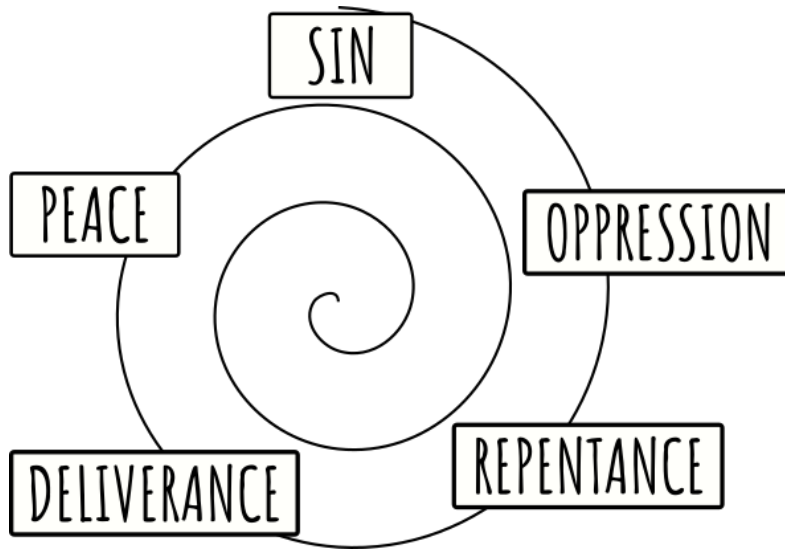
God's power is so extraordinary that he can use evil to wipe out evil! How has he done this for us?

Check out Romans 5.1-2. How does justice bring peace in our lives?

Judges 8.34 says that Israel forgot God and forgot how he saves. What are some practical ways we can remind ourselves of gospel grace, and remind ourselves that it is God who loves us, saves us, and grows us?

**READ JUDGES 10-12**

Note where the events of this section match up with the pattern of the book of Judges.



Do the main characters lead God's people well, or badly?

What does God do?

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STUDY 3  
**JUDGES 10-12**

Do you ever find yourself wanting to make a bargain with God? What makes you feel this way?

**READ JUDGES 10**

No enemy of Israel is named in the time of Tola and Jair. Who do you think Israel needs saving from?

How would you describe Israel's relationship with God in chapter 10?

What comforting things do we learn about God from this recap of how Judges is playing out? How is this also a comfort to you?

**READ JUDGES 11.1-28**

Who chooses Jephthah to lead Israel?

What bargain does Jephthah make?

What tactics does Jephthah use to attempt to rescue Israel?

## READ JUDGES 11.29-12.15

What bargain does Jephthah make? Why would he do this?<sup>1</sup> Was he right to make this vow? Was he right to keep it?<sup>2</sup>

What tactics does Jephthah use to resolve this dispute, and what is the result?

How would you evaluate Jephthah's rescue of Israel? What was his weakness?

## THINK IT OVER

This section of Judges marks a new low in the story so far – child sacrifice by Israel's leader, and a civil war where God's people oppress and slaughter one another – yet somehow God still does not abandon his people!

To what extent is God able to save us despite our rashness, foolishness, and weakness? How has he done this in your life?

Check out Romans 8.26-30. What reasons does Paul give for trusting God's goodness (rather than trying to make a bargain with him)?

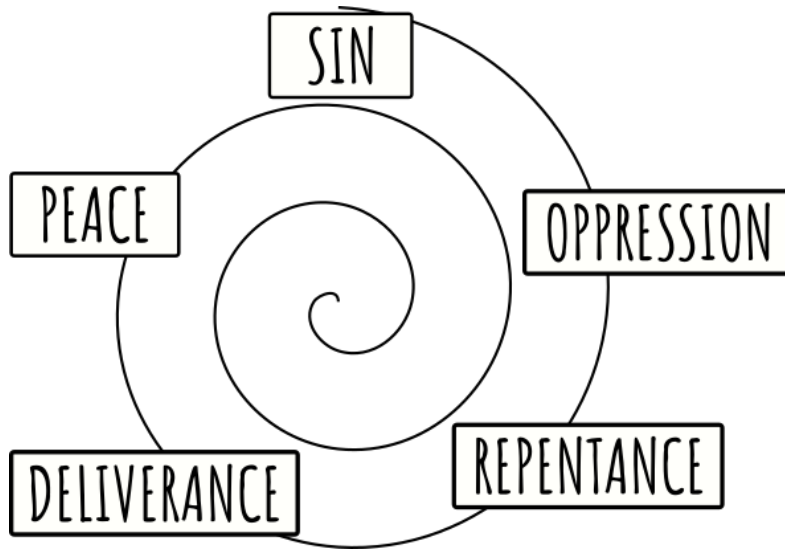
Judges 10.16 describes God as becoming "impatient" (ESV), "weary" (CSB), or 'unable to bear' (NIV) Israel's repeated return to sin and rejection of him, and their subsequent misery. Are there areas of your life where it is helpful to be reminded that God is impatient with us turning from him to sin?

1 Leviticus 18.21, Deuteronomy 18.9-10

2 Leviticus 5.4-6, Deuteronomy 12.30-31

**READ JUDGES 13-16**

Note where the events of this section match up with the pattern of the book of Judges.



Do the main characters lead God's people well, or badly?

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STUDY 4  
**JUDGES 13-16**

Which judge has been best so far? What if you could choose features from different judges and combine them—which features from what judges would you choose?

**READ JUDGES 13**

How does Manoah's wife respond to God's words? How does Manoah respond to God's words?

Check out Luke 1.26-38. What similarities does this share with Judges 13?

**READ JUDGES 14**

What is God doing?

How aligned is Samson's agenda with God's agenda?

**READ JUDGES 15**

How do you feel about Samson's actions in this chapter?

Is God's promise from Judges 13.5 being fulfilled?

## READ JUDGES 16

Who do the Philistines attribute their victory to (16.23-24)? Are they right (16.20)?

Does the nature of Samson's death change your impression of him?

## THINK IT OVER

The Book of Judges follows a pattern, but Samson's life seems to follow its own pattern too. Can you describe it? In what ways is it similar to the pattern of the whole book? In what ways is it different?

In what ways is Samson like Jesus?

In what ways is Samson different to Jesus?

Samson is the last of the Judges. How would you rate him against all the others? Which of the Judges has particularly helped you appreciate Jesus' rule and rescue?

**READ JUDGES 17-21**

The events of this last section of Judges are sickening in almost every way. Why do you think God has kept this part of his word for us?

Do the main characters lead God's people well, or badly?

What does God do?

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STUDY 5  
**JUDGES 17-21**

What would life be like without any government?

**READ JUDGES 17-18**

If Micah and his family and the Levite are typical of Israel, how has living among the Canaanites in the Promised Land affected them?

What is the leadership situation in Israel (17.6, 18.1)?

What is your impression of the tribe of Dan? How do they compare to Micah?

Is it surprising that even by the end of the Book of Judges the tribe of Dan hasn't settled in the Promised Land (cf. Judges 1.34)?

Micah's name means, 'Who is like the LORD?' How do chapters 17 and 18 show us that no one here has the slightest clue what God is like?

When do you find it tempting to treat God the way Micah and the tribe of Dan did?

**READ JUDGES 19**

Why is it pointed out to us in 19.1 that there was no king in Israel?

What is your impression of each of the characters in this chapter?

- the father-in-law?
- the old man from Ephraim?

- the people of Gibeah (Benjaminites)?
- the Levite?

## READ JUDGES 20

Israel is shocked into action by the appalling and disturbing events of chapter 19. How does Israel respond?

What do you make of Israel's interactions with God in this chapter?

To what extent is this tragic civil war Israel's own fault (cf. Judges 2.1-3)?

## READ JUDGES 21

How would you describe the state of God's people at the end of Judges?

## THINK IT OVER

What conclusion does the author make about Israel's problem (21.25)?

Are there any positives to draw from the horrible events of these last few chapters?

By the end of the Book of Judges we are left with the overwhelming conviction that we need a king who can overcome sin! Wonderfully for us, we have such a king—Jesus. How has the Book of Judges helped you appreciate King Jesus?

Imagine a non-Christian friend of yours says, "The world is a mess—full of evil, corruption, suffering, and injustice! If God is real, why does he let it happen, and why won't he fix it?" How would you respond?