

## **Epic Fail** ***How the Cycle of Sin Gets Started***

### ***Introduction:***

WE all fail sometimes. We mess up, foul up, and screw up. We fall down, fall on our face, fall flat, fall to pieces, and even fall on our swords. Things go downhill, it all comes crashing down, and we go down in flames. Something blows up in our face and we have to wait until everything blows over. Sometimes our efforts go to the dogs. Other times they go over like a lead balloon, or they simply go up in smoke. Every single one of us has made a royal mess of things at one time or another.

One of the great things about living in the 21st Century is that if you have an face plant, there's a very good chance someone will catch it on video and put it online and your failure will live on in infamy, just like these epic fails:

Last week we started a series from the book of Judges. We often teach the book of Judges, especially in children's Sunday School as a collection of epic heroes. We have Gideon whose army was the original 300 who took on 135,000 Midianite soldiers, and unlike the 300 Spartans at Thermopylae, they won. We have Samson's feats of strength like killing 1,000 men with the jawbone of a donkey.

The problem with these stories of heroic valor is that they are surrounded by epic failure. We saw last week how Israel was a fallen people and they fell into the same trap again and again. The cycle begins with rebellion as Israel turns from God's ways. Then she experiences God's rejection as He removes His hand of blessing. Without divine provision and protection Israel faces ruin at the hands of her enemies. Then in repentance the people cry out to God. God hears their cry and sends judges to rescue her. Israel then experiences a time of restoration. For more than 300 years Israel was not able to break this cycle. Even her heroes fell into the same trap. And yet through all of this we see that God is faithful. He still loves his people and longs to heal them.

Before we look at some of the individual stories of these judges, we need to consider just how Israel set herself up for failure. The truth is they set themselves up for failure. If we can understand their foundation for failure, then we can avoid the same mistakes in our own lives. I think one of the reasons Judges is included in the Bible is because what's past is prologue

for failure in our own lives.

### I. Failure to Pass the Torch

The path to failure was paved first with a failure to pass the torch of faith from one generation to the next. This happened because they failed to pass the torch of godly leadership. They had a legacy of godly leadership. It began with Moses who led the nation from captivity in Egypt through her wilderness years. The torch was then passed to a faithful leader and warrior named Joshua.

Let me show you something. Joshua is the book that precedes Judges, not only in the order they appear in your Bible, but also historically. The book of Joshua begins about 40 years before the book of Judges. Both books begin with the death of a major leader, but with one major difference. Listen to Joshua 1:1, *“After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses assistant...”* That’s all we need right there. Notice that as soon as Moses died, Joshua was ready to step into his shoes. He had worked with Moses for years. Moses had mentored him and trained him. The torch of godly leadership was passed from to the next.

Now listen to Judges 1:1, *“After the death of Joshua, the people of Israel inquired of the Lord, “Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?”* When Joshua dies, there’s nobody obvious to take his place. The people are wondering, *“Who’s going to lead us now?”* In the next few verses we see Caleb take the lead in some of the battles, but the problem with Caleb was that he was one of Joshua’s peers, not his protégé. He was part of Joshua’s own generation. Joshua failed to train up anyone to pick up the torch behind him. This is why it’s not really surprising when we read the following in Judges 2:6-10:

*<sup>6</sup> When Joshua dismissed the people, the people of Israel went each to his inheritance to take possession of the land. <sup>7</sup> And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work that the Lord had done for Israel. <sup>8</sup> And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of 110 years. <sup>9</sup> And they buried him within the boundaries of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash. <sup>10</sup> And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel.*

This failure to pass the torch of godly leadership would repeat itself again and again.

One generation knew the Lord and served Him faithfully, but then they failed to pass that on to their children. We read in 2:18-19:

<sup>18</sup> *Whenever the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge, and he saved them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge. For the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them.* <sup>19</sup> *But whenever the judge died, they turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them.*

What happened? Now I realize every generation wonders what's wrong with the next generation? People love to pick in millennials today. The millennials will pick on Generation Z. But something is seriously going wrong with this generational dynamic we see in Judges. Their parents have seen the mighty hand of God. They were eyewitness of his wonders. They experienced his provision and protection first hand. But the next generation comes along and they lose all connection to that. They were more influenced by the pagan culture around them, than they were their parents and their own family history. How did it happen? How did that generation grow up knowing neither the Lord nor what He had done for Israel?

#### **A. Influence of the Culture**

Of course, there was the influence of the culture. They were surrounded by Canaanites and Jebusites and Amorites- all kinds of bad influences. I described a bit last week about how cruel and evil these people were. Pagan shrines were everywhere. Seductive temptations lured them from all sides.

#### **B. Change in Standard of Living**

Add to that the fact that their lifestyles and standard of living had changed dramatically from Joshua's generation. That generation had escaped Egypt while they were still young; they knew oppression, poverty, and war. They lived life as wandering nomads. When they finally got to the Promised Land, they settled down and began to build homes, and grow crops of their own... for the first time in centuries. This was the generation that said, "I want my kids to have all the things I never had." Does that sound familiar?

But the next generation did not know any of the hardships or difficulties faced by the earlier generation. They didn't know what it felt like to be dependent on God just to eat every day. They had everything handed to them. They enjoyed a more leisurely lifestyle. Perhaps they just expected these blessings. Maybe they thought it was theirs by right. They had an

entitlement mentality.

### **C. Failure of their Parents**

The greatest factor however was the failure of one generation to pass on spiritual truth and values to the next generation. Their parents had given them many material blessings, but they didn't pass the torch of faith. They didn't give them spiritual treasure. They neglected to tell their children the stories of how God had led them out of Egypt, of how God miraculously provided for them, of how God delivered them from the hands of their enemies. They failed to repeat, over and over again, how God had given them the Law and why it was so important.

The mothers taught their daughters how to beat soiled linen on the river rocks, how to weave the finest fabrics, and how to prepare the finest meals. The fathers emphasized the importance of bringing in the crops, and how to dress and process sheep from the flocks, but they never got around to teaching God's precepts. They had camels to trade, barns to build, parties to plan, weddings to attend- a hundred things to do- but moral and spiritual instruction never made it to the top of their busy schedules. They failed to pass on the torch and thus the foundation for failure was laid.

Just how important was it that the Israelites passed on the torch of faith? Listen to Deut 6:6-9:

*6 These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*

By failing to pass the spiritual torch to the next generation, the next generation had no foundation for truth. They had no standards for right and wrong. They just made it up for themselves. There is an interesting verse that occurs twice in Judges. We find it in 17:6 and in 21:1. Here's what it says, *"In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."*

It's not talking about an earthly ruler. God never intended for Israel to have an earthly king. He warned them against it, when they asked for one. God was to be their king. But during the time of Judges God wasn't their king. They had no king. They had no absolute truth. There was no standard of right or wrong. You could just do whatever felt right for you.

It's exactly our culture today. I must find my own way. Follow your own heart. Be true to yourself. Find your own personal truth. We have no king, no absolute truth. We just do what seems right in our own eyes.

What do we see happening today? We see a generation of young people who are influenced less by their parents than they are by the culture around them. It is a culture filled with idols and counterfeits, a culture that can't tell the difference between right and wrong, a culture that can't distinguish between human and animal, male and female, reason and madness, art and pornography, truth and propaganda.

Our children are not adopting our values and morals. They do not share our priorities and perspectives. We can't blame our culture. We cannot blame the government, we cannot blame the Supreme Court. We cannot blame the schools. We cannot blame Miley Cyrus. We can't blame social media. None of them are entrusted with communicating biblical truth to our children- we are! Parents we are the ones God has put in place to be the primary influencers in our kid's lives.

I realize we can't completely control everything that happens in our kid's lives, a part of being a good parent is giving them some freedom to fail. I'm not an advocate of helicopter parenting. Being a parent though means we must be the primary gatekeepers of the influences we allow in our children's lives.

If we allow the TV to be our kids primary babysitter, that's on us. Moms and dads, how often do you check out your kid's cell phone? Do you know what apps they have? Do you read their text messages? Do you have their social media passwords? What sort of limits do you have set for them? We've got some kids out there that should be on flip phones, not smart phones. What sort of boundaries do you set for media and entertainment? Do you know what they're watching? Do you know what they're listening to? Do you ever discuss the movies you see from a Biblical perspective? Do you realize every movie, every song, every TV show is a sermon. Nothing is ever "just entertainment." It is reflective someone's worldview, their understanding of truth and right and wrong. If we're too busy, too lazy, or too disinterested to discuss the moral perversion, corrupt values, and outright lies they try to shove down our throat, that's on us.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying we shouldn't have TVs or go to movies or listen to music. However, our kids need our help in filtering the messages that these things proclaim. They depend on us to help them evaluate the values they hear and see. They have not yet developed the moral, psychological, or even intellectual capacity to handle these things by themselves.

The reason our children are not adopting our values is not because of the state of American society, but because of how we respond to it. We have lived with the wrong priorities. We have spent our time and money in the wrong places. We have neglected to constantly impress our children with spiritual truth. We have tried to express our love for our children with things and activities instead of spiritual truth.

A message like this mornings can be helpful if you children are still quite young. It can encourage you on the right path. It can keep you from avoiding some common pitfalls. But what if your kids are already teens and this is a real struggle. It's kind of late to start when they're 16 or 17 years old.

I'll say right up front that I'm not an expert on parenting difficult teens, because I've never had to do it. We started with both of our girls when they were babies. We discussed this. We sought wise counsel. We had a shared vision for how we would raise our girls. I tell people we did most of our parenting before our girls were 5. We fought and won every major battle before the girls ever started 1<sup>st</sup> grade. And some of those were very difficult battles. However, since we won those battles when they were three, we didn't have to fight them when they were fifteen. This is why I believe some of this stuff very strongly. I will say this.

1.) Start where you are and take small steps. You're not going to get there overnight. 2.) Communicate openly with your kids. Be honest about where you are and what you are doing. Explain your expectations and encourage their input. 3.) You are their parent not their best friend. It's more important they respect you, rather than like you. If you want them to be a best friend when they're 30, then be a parent when they are 13. 4.) Practice what you preach. Teens can see hypocrisy a mile away and it will undermine everything. 5.) Both parents have to be on the same team. You've got back each other on this stuff. If one of you undermines the other, it will never work. If you are the only believer in your marriage, or you are a single parent, then you

have an extra challenge. My heart goes out to you. Recruit all the backup you can from your grandparents and friends.

I want parents to understand their God-given responsibilities in this matter, but I also realize many older parents live with undue guilt and shame when their children go off the rails or leave the faith. If you've messed up a parent, then you need to confess that. First, you confess it to God. Lord, you entrusted me as a mom or a dad and charged me to do certain things for my child. I didn't do that like I should. Confess it to your children. There are some things I should have done for you when you were younger, and I dropped the ball, and I'm sorry. Hopefully, your children will forgive you. I do know this. God will forgive you. There is grace and there is mercy. And from that place of grace, you can start working to do things right from here on out.

Also, as parents, we can only lay a foundation for faith. We can't build their faith. We can't save them. We can't believe for them. We give them a foundation for faith, but it's up to them to build on that or not. They ultimately choose for themselves. Just because your child has made some foolish choices, or rejected the faith, doesn't mean you're a failure. Don't beat yourself up for that. I know we hurt for our kids. I know it breaks your heart. I know some of you have been praying for years. That's okay, but don't be swallowed in guilt or shame. Don't wear your child's choices like a ball and chain. Each person is responsible for their own faith and for their own choices.