



TAKEAWAY THOUGHT: You don't have to stay trapped in sin and shame. God wants to redeem you.

SCRIPTURE: Judges 2:10-14 and 18-19, Romans 7:14-15 and 24-25,

INTRO

[Author note: I begin by talking about my own journey and struggles with weight loss. Tell a story about finding yourself in a cycle, making the same mistakes and same corrections repeatedly.]

Growing up, I heard a lot of negative things about the people of Israel in the church. It was an odd way to process the Bible, because the Bible tells us in James 1 that the Word of God is like a mirror. The words, stories, and lessons in it are meant to tell us about God and give us a glimpse into our own selves. When we read the failings of the Israelites in the Old Testament, it's not meant to heap shame on them; it's meant to show us a pattern we will be tempted to trap ourselves in, and honestly, most of us do get trapped in patterns.

I have repeatedly found myself trapped in the same pattern or cycle. I have struggled with my weight for a long time, which is odd, because I know how to lose weight and have been very successful in it. I can think of a few times that I've been really successful dieting and exercising and lost significant weight, but staying there is a struggle for me. I'm back in the cycle again, which is sad. From 2018-2019, I lost 100 pounds of fat, and I told myself I'd never let myself get overweight again. I knew how I needed to eat, and I knew how I needed to workout. I was all set. But then I told myself it'd be okay to give up for a while, to take an extended break. I'd catch myself before it got too far, and losing my weight again would be easy.

This is a lie I had told myself before, but I always believe I'm better this time. Well, I haven't been so far. A little reckless eating keeps turning into a lot of reckless eating for me. A little skipping of working out turns into months of absence. And I find myself back where I don't want to be again. I knew what could happen if I wasn't disciplined, and it did. It's a cycle. And

now I have to work harder to take off weight than I would have had to work to just keep it off.

TENSION

How many destructive patterns have we repeated? For some, it may be constantly jumping from relationship to relationship, and sometimes it's from bad relationship to bad relationship. For others, it may be a pattern of putting off what you need to get done in school, falling behind, and then stressing yourself out trying to get caught up. And maybe year-by-year, you tell yourself you won't do it again, but that progress report comes, and you wonder how you let it happen again. Still, others get trapped in a cycle of doing something they really wish they hadn't, maybe even sin. You feel ashamed and resolved that you'll never do whatever that is again, but you find yourself right back in it and as ashamed as ever.

The Israelites in the Old Testament knew what would happen if they weren't disciplined, too. They had seen it played out numerous times. They would get caught in a cycle. They'd end up going further than they expected, pay more than they wanted to pay, and lose more than they were willing to lose. Their cycle has been called a few names, named for different reasons. The traditional term is the "Deuteronomic Cycle." It gets this name, because the cycle played out most vividly from the Old Testament books from Deuteronomy to Second Kings. It's a weird name, but maybe you'll remember it. Others call it the sin cycle, naming it after the character and failings of the people involved. Still others call it the redemption cycle. Redemption is the act of purchasing someone's freedom back for them. I like this name best, because it focuses on the unchanging nature of God: He is a God who redeems. He is never unwilling to free His people, even though we often end up enslaved by our own choices.

Here's what the cycle looks like:

Israel falls into sin → Israel is oppressed → Israel turns back to and cries out to God → God hears and sends a deliverer → Israel is faithful to God.

When Israel would fall into sin, that doesn't mean that they messed up and made a mistake. It means that, as a nation, they turned their back on God entirely. They stopped worshipping and obeying Him, even though they

were His Chosen People, called and established by Him. They had a covenant with God, and God had promised to bless them as a nation if they remained faithful to Him. But they also agreed to punishment if they didn't remain faithful.

TRUTH

Judges is the book where this pattern plays out most obviously. In the book of Judges, the Israelites had settled into the Promise Land but didn't finish driving out their enemies, and they didn't have a king. They had prophets, priests, and even a high priest. Ultimately, the nation was to be led by God, not any one human. But they didn't always like being led by God.

Judges 2:10-14 (NLT)

¹⁰ After that generation died, another generation grew up who did not acknowledge the Lord or remember the mighty things he had done for Israel. ¹¹ The Israelites did evil in the Lord's sight and served the images of Baal. ¹² They abandoned the Lord, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They went after other gods, worshiping the gods of the people around them. And they angered the Lord. ¹³ They abandoned the Lord to serve Baal and the images of Ashtoreth. ¹⁴ This made the Lord burn with anger against Israel, so he handed them over to raiders who stole their possessions. He turned them over to their enemies all around, and they were no longer able to resist them.

This was only the beginning. The people kept falling into sin, so the cycle would begin. They would fall into sin and turn their backs on God. God would turn them over to judgment, which in those days meant being conquered and oppressed by enemy nations. Eventually, they'd remember that life was in fact better with God, and they would begin to cry out to Him for help, promising to turn back to Him. Then God would send what was called a "Judge," which weren't like our judges today in our judicial systems. Rather, Judges at this time, were rescuers. They were strong military leaders that were sent to save the people of Israel from their oppressors.

Judges 2:18-19 (NLT)



TAKEAWAY THOUGHT: You may feel like you've gone too far and been away for too long, but God wants to be in your life right now.

SCRIPTURE: Judges 13:1-5, 24-25, Judges 16:6, 17-21, 23-24, 28-30

SURFACE

What's the furthest you've been from home? What did it feel like to be there and to be so far from home?

SERIOUS

If you are comfortable, share about a time when you grew apart from someone you had been close to. Please be careful not to gossip. Don't use names or the relationship if necessary.

How does it feel to grow apart from a friend?

SPIRITUAL

We have all drifted from God. We have taken small steps of disobedience that, when added together, create a huge distance between us and Him. When you have drifted, do you recognize a pattern in your starting point? What causes you to drift?

God wants to have a relationship with you right now. How does that statement feel to you? If you have a hard time believing it, tell us why you struggle to believe it.

Early in Samson's life, when he stubbornly headed down the wrong path, the Bible says this: ***⁴ His father and mother didn't realize the Lord was at work in this, creating an opportunity to work against the Philistines, who ruled over Israel at that time. (Judges 16:4 NLT).*** You may have things in your past that you regret. How might God have been at work in that? How might God use your past to bring freedom and justice to other people?

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