

## Teen Toolchest

### Chapter 8: A Few Good Men and Women

#### *In this Toolchest:*

***Tool #1 Dramatic Readings***

***Tool #2 Quiz: Here Comes the Judge***

***Tool #3 Talk: Cycles of Sin (uses PowerPoint)***

***Tool #4 Talk: What Costume Are You Wearing? (uses PowerPoint)***

***Tool #5 Discussion Questions***

***Tool #6 Chapter Summary***

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#### **Tool #1 Dramatic Readings**

##### **Characters:**

- Ehud, could be dressed as a farm boy
- Deborah, business woman attire
- Gideon, a scrawny weakling
- Samson, a muscleman with long hair

##### **Ehud**

Hi everybody I'm Ehud. [*Crowd responds, Hi Ehud.*] I ruled the Israelites for quite a while. In fact, my countrymen had peace for 80 years because the Lord had favor with the way I properly ruled and followed His lead. I'm a lefty, a southpaw to those that know baseball terminology. Maybe it's strange that the Bible denotes that I was left-handed, but you'll see why in a minute. I might even have a career in pitching except for I was born about 3,000 years before the sport was invented . . . anyway, I made it into The Story because of a really crazy scuffle that took place between me and this Moabite king named Eglon. Eglon was a big man, very rotund . . . I'm trying to be politically correct here, but the guy loved his desserts. I mean come on; even the Bible says he was fat. When I attacked him on his summer vacation getaway, I stabbed him with my sword and not only the blade, but also the handle sunk into his belly. He never saw it coming because I went in with the left hand, boy! Check it out in Judges 3 if you don't believe that part. I wanted my sword back, but I couldn't get it out of him! Stuck in the cellulite. Well, I wish I could say that all of my people, I mean God's people, followed HIS rules after I moved on. But all too often they would worship other idols and sing praises to the wrong gods. There's really no such thing as other gods but we Israeli's sure did find ways to create them. I am thankful, however, to have defeated Moab, the country to our east. I wonder what's going to happen next.

## Deborah

Hello people, I am Deborah. [*Crowd responds, Hi Deborah.*] I am the one and only female judge, thank you very much. My Hebrew name is Honeybee, and I WILL sting you. I filled in as a judge after Ehud, but by then, our entire nation was acting foolish and crazy. I mean crazy. And because they did what was evil in God's eyes, the Canaanites to our north dominated us. Seriously, this was an army that had 900 chariots, if you want to play the numbers game. They turned us into slaves for 20 years. 20 long, ridiculous, its 100-degrees-all-year-long-and-I-thought-this-was-supposed-to-be-the-Promised-Land-years. So, since I am a woman and don't have tons of military experience I got this guy named Barak (Bear-uk) to lead the army. Well, he knew that I loved God so he just flat out said, "We are going to fight the Canaanites but I need you to go with us." He got me, the honeybee, to go to war with the boys. Funny how the Lord uses all kinds of people to accomplish his work. And with me he used my leadership and love for HIM to lead Israel to 40 more years of peace with the nations around us. Still, 40 years isn't that long, there has to be another way to have peace, peace with everyone. P.S I wrote this song that not many people know, but it has to be a famous song, because helloooo, the lyrics made it in the Bible. With that being said, one of my favorite lines in my song says that, "*When leaders lead and people willingly offer themselves to service, praise the LORD above.*"

## Gideon

Hey everybody, I'm Gideon. [*Crowd responds: Hi Gideon.*] God called me a mighty warrior, and I guess it's true, but there was a time when a jellyfish had more backbone than I did. When I lived in the Promise Land, sometime after Deborah, most of God's people did what was wicked...again. It starts sounding like a broken record after a while, I guess. But our arch enemies at this time were called the Midianites. They were real mean dudes, like when we would plant different things for food, for example, they would come through our land and rip out all of our crops. Talk about fear, I threshed wheat inside a winepress for seven years. Oh yeah, I forgot, you are young and don't know what threshing is or what a winepress is for that matter, so...I did an outdoor job inside a stinkin' cave. Make sense? Okay. So God comes out of nowhere and asks me to be the next ruler—leader guy for ALL OF ISRAEL. I was like, "God? My family is little and unknown and I am little and unknown in my family. I'm just a wimp...God was like, "OK, wimp, well, you're the guy. You're the one I have chosen to give your people a chance to regain the Promised Land...again. And I will give it to you. Hello, I'm God, I can do this." I asked God to show me his proof and faithfulness by making a lamb's fleece wet where the ground was dry and then making the ground wet and the fleece dry. I know, kind of weird requests, but I wanted to see if God was who he said he was. If God was really legit. He was. God is sooo patient with us. To make a long story short, I had 32,000 men to take Midian by storm and get them off our backs once and for all. But God said we had too many men for battle. "Too many men for battle? Is that possible?" God smiled and told me that was way too many, and that 300 men would do just fine. 300 men!? If that wasn't enough to give me a heart attack, God said all we needed was trumpets and torches for weapons. Trumpets to attack a city? Where have I heard that before? God is all about using small things of this world to make a big deal of his strength.

## Samson

Hello, Samson here. *[Crowd responds, Hi Samson.]* Wouldn't you know that as soon as my hero Gideon dies, we Israelites start worshipping other false idols, give up on the God who delivers us and give way to other enemies. The Midianites only dominated us for seven years, but when I came around, it was all about the Philistines, and they had us in submission for 40... long... years. Only God knows why, but for whatever reason, he became real to me as a young boy. And he assured me that I would lead my people, I mean his people. And another thing that I got really pumped about is that he gave me big muscles and really great hair. Mine was really long because my tribe didn't believe in cutting hair or drinking alcohol. So, I looked like a rock star but stayed away from all the parties. And get this, when my hair was long, I was pretty much the all-time beast. My story can be summed up in that I loved God and trusted him in so many areas, but also doubted his promise. My weakness was girls. Delilah was my ultimate stumbling block. She found out that my "Kryptonite" was... *[whisper]* short hair. When I had... *[whisper]* short hair... I was weak, so much so that I was easily captured and arrested, even though at certain times in my life, with long hair, I killed wild beasts and thousands of men at a time...literally. Like thousands...Thanks a lot for ruining that, Delilah...oh, it's what you do to me *[dramatic pause]*. In the end, I trusted God, and although it cost me my eyesight and my life, I was able to kill more Philistines on the day I died than all the other days that I lived combined. I never gave up on God, but I just tried to put things in my own hands too much. I guess that's the danger of relying on your own strength. Nobody has ever been as physically strong as I was, yet it seems as if all too often people have their own plans and battles they think they can conquer on their own. You can find my story in Judges Chapters 13, 14, 15, AND 16. Oh, yeah, I'm also in Hebrews 11, the hall of faith. Hey, these muscles have to fit in somewhere.

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## Tool #2 Quiz: Here Comes the Judge

Your team's goal is to match the list of characteristics and actions with these judges and leaders of Israel.

A. Othniel      B. Ehud      C. Deborah      D. Gideon      E. Samson

1. The spirit of the LORD stirred in me at a young age. \_\_\_\_\_
2. I was Israel's first judge. \_\_\_\_\_
3. I led a surprise attack on an overweight opponent. \_\_\_\_\_

4. God called me a mighty warrior. \_\_\_\_\_
5. I was Caleb's younger brother. \_\_\_\_\_
6. I oversaw 10,000 men defeat Sisera. \_\_\_\_\_
7. My tribe, the Nazarites did not drink alcohol or cut our hair. \_\_\_\_\_
8. I was a scared of Midian so I threshed wheat inside a winepress. \_\_\_\_\_
9. Israel had peace for 80 years after me. \_\_\_\_\_
10. My courthouse was located between Ramah and Bethel. \_\_\_\_\_
11. I spoke in poetic form often. \_\_\_\_\_
12. I tested God with a wool fleece. \_\_\_\_\_

### Answer Key

*The spirit of the LORD stirred in me at a young age.—Samson*

*Israel's first judge—Othniel*

*Surprise attack on a overweight opponent—Ehud*

*God called me a mighty warrior.—Gideon*

*Caleb's younger brother—Othniel*

*I oversaw 10,000 men defeat Sisera—Deborah*

*My tribe, the Nazarites did not drink alcohol or cut our hair.—Samson*

*I was scared of Midian so I threshed wheat in a winepress—Gideon*

*Israel had peace for 80 years after me.—Ehud*

*My courthouse was located between Ramah and Bethel—Deborah*

*I spoke in poetic form often. —Samson*

*I tested God with a wool fleece. —Gideon*

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## Tool #3 Talk: *Cycles of Sin and How to Avoid Them*

### Materials Needed:

- PowerPoint presentation
- Optional guest testimony regarding overcoming addiction

### I. How not to get trapped in the sin cycle

This isn't a talk a how-to stop drinking or gossiping or shoplifting. It's not just for those of you caught up in the popularity trap, or for those with eating disorders. It's not just for people with random sex thoughts and behaviors. It's not just for those of you who cheat at school. It's not just for you prideful kids who think you're all that at academics, sports, or art—or too spiritual for a talk about sin.

This is about how to create a life environment where sin is less likely to trap you. If you are in a sin cycle, here are some ways any of those sin cycles can be broken. These are general principles to follow if you want to live a life that is not characterized by the ups and downs of sin.

### II. Having a good leader keeps sin from festering

When the Israelites had a strong leader, they fared better. They got rid of their idols and prospered. But as soon as the leader died, the Israelites returned to their old ways. Each generation did the same thing. They “forgot” about God's goodness. Then they ran into trouble. They became victims of violence. The Canaanites destroyed their crops. They were starving. Their army wasn't strong enough to defend against the superior weapons of their neighbors.

Not only did the Canaanites destroy the food, they destroyed the Israelite culture. The Israelites weren't strong enough to resist the sinful temple worship of Baal and Ashtoreth. Mingling with the nonbelievers led the Israelites off track every time.

#### Applications:

- Keep yourself under the mentorship of strong leaders. Lone-ranger Christians often become non-Christians or backsliders. Make it a habit to come to church and youth group where you'll find Christian encouragement.
- Also, make it a goal to become a Christian leader. As you go through middle school and on to high school, be asking God for ways you can encourage others. Prayerfully make that your aim.
- And also, seek out other Christians to hang with. No person was meant to live a holy life alone. We were created to be in community—you are part of the Body.

#### Slide #2 1 Corinthians 12:27

*Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*

- If your father or mother is a strong Christian, evaluate how to best use that gift. Many of you will be wanting to emotionally pull away from your parents. This is natural at your age—but not always wise and certainly not mandatory. If you soften your heart and are able to listen to them and learn from them, you can bet that your paths will be straighter and you'll have less trouble. You don't have time in life to make every mistake—let your parents help you avoid some of them.
- For those of you from non-Christian homes, you can still learn a lot from your parents. But you also need to make sure you get to church where you can find small group leaders to talk to. Tell me or another leader if you need special help finding adults to talk to. We care and want to help be the leaders you need us to be.

### **Recap:**

You're old enough now to be in control of who your friends are and who you spend time with. If you maintain contact with good Christians and seek out good leadership, you're less likely to be trapped in a cycle of sin.

### **III. Don't forget God's goodness!**

The Israelites doubted that God's mercy would continue. Every time they ran into trouble, they became complainers. Look at Gideon; in essence he told the angel that he didn't believe in the miracles of the God who brought them out of Egypt. *"Pardon me, my Lord," Gideon replied, "but if the Lord is with us, why is all this happening?"* [The Story, page 89]

Jesus said that we would have tribulation. We will sin. Those around us will sin. We will have wars and rumors of war. We will get cancer. We will have economic distress. Some of your parents will get divorced. Some of you may get divorced later in life. I may let you down—even the leaders I told you to seek out will let you down. But that doesn't mean God isn't good and loving.

### **Application: Be Thankful**

Some days and periods of your life will be more difficult than others. When you are in the good times, make it a habit to thank God for the good things. Did you do well on a test? Thank him. Do you have enough food? Thank him. Do friends remember your birthday? Thank Him. Then, when there are times when you don't have so much to be thankful for, those memories will come back. A habit of thankfulness will sustain you till you can see the goodness of the present again.

#### **Slide #3 Psalm 116:12**

*How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me?*

There's something mystical that happens spiritually when we thank God. The Holy Spirit works in our favor. There's not any one verse that explains it, but we can see from Paul's writings that even when he was in prison and in dark places, he still had the energy to thank God.

#### Slide #4 Acts 16:25

*Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.*

Be thankful for others' good fortune too. Instead of getting jealous of your friends when good things happen to them, let it become another reason for you to say thanks. This will keep your heart from envy and also teach you how to benefit from the blessings of others. Sharing a joy makes it stronger. That way when you're in personal distress, the habit of being happy for someone else will be there. You will be able to take the focus off of yourself all the more easily.

#### Slide #5 Philippians 1:3

*I thank my God every time I remember you.*

Being thankful will keep you happy. If you want to avoid a pattern of sin and cycles of darkness in your life, learn to be thankful. You'll have more hope and energy to defeat depression and sin when it comes looking for you.

### IV. Remember that God is always at work

When you know that God is at work, even through cycles of sin, and during the bad times, this is called hope.

Samson's weakness for foreign women put him in jeopardy. He got in poor relationships twice, and visited prostitutes. But God used these circumstances as a way to restrain the Philistines.

#### Slide #6 The Story, Page 93

*Samson's parents didn't know that this was from the Lord, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines.*

Also remember that God used Joseph's brothers' evil for good. Think of yourself as a thread in a giant tapestry. You may not be able to see the entire picture because you woven in so tightly to the others around you. But if you could get God's perspective, you'd see an artistic masterpiece. Or it's like if you are a fly and you land on the Thanksgiving table. You might only know about the sugar bowl, but not about the turkey, the potatoes, the rolls, the cranberries.

#### **Application: God uses evil for good purposes**

##### **Guest Testimony:**

- Introduce a guest to give their testimony regarding overcoming addiction. Allow time for questions if possible.

OR

*[Tell a story about someone who recovered from addiction, such as this: I know of one family where the husband got heavily into alcohol. He had buried whiskey bottles all over the back yard. At work, his desk drawers were full of empty bottles—he was afraid to throw them away in case a coworker found them. Basically, his marriage and family and job were on the line. After going through counseling and some hard times, the man came back to the family with a renewed commitment to quit drinking*

*alcohol. Through this ordeal, he also learned how to better relate to his family. He became a better listener. He began to repair the relationship with his mother and father. Overall, this crisis showed him that he had more areas to work on than just drinking. Was anyone happy about the alcoholism—no, but we're happy that the crisis led to healing in more areas than just alcohol.]*

God is in the job of redemption. He'll take the evil and use it for a good purpose. It may take a long time—I can almost guarantee that, but it will happen in the right time.

If you remember the good things that God has done, helplessness and bitterness will stay away. Those are emotions that lead people into sin and keep them in it. If you nurture hope in God, hope will nurture you. Hope in God will keep you from the depths of despair. It will give you the power to break away from whatever is holding you.

## V. Have faith

If you exercise faith even when circumstances look dismal, and you'll avoid a downward spiral. Head knowledge is good. Logic is good. But it cannot stand alone. God works in bizarre ways, and Judges is a good example. The only judge that was highlighted that was “normal” was Othniel. You'd expect the brother of Caleb to be strong in faith.

But Deborah? While today we respect the merits of women, back then they were second-class citizens. She was not a choice of God that made intellectual sense, but she was chosen by God because of her faith. He gave her power and wisdom to know when to attack.

And Gideon? Why would God pick a youngest son of the weakest tribe? He deliberately chose “the least of these” to bring his glory?

And what about trimming Gideon's army down to 300? That didn't make military sense ... but God wanted His people to know His supernatural powers were at work.

Okay, and Samson. Basically, he's a chump. He did not understand how sex and marriage were supposed to work. He went against his parents' wishes and instructions by marrying a Canaanite woman. He went to brothels. He fell in love with Delilah and didn't break up **even when he knew she was trying to trap him**. Not a lot of brains in this one. Why was he chosen as a judge?

### Applications:

- Listen with your heart. God's call is often a surprise. Don't limit God to offering you logical solutions. He often works outside the box, in ways you'd never think. Keep your eyes peeled for his goodness. Be waiting for that angel to show up in your wine press.

### Slide #7 Ephesians 3:20

*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us*

*[Tell a story when God did something in your life that was outside the box, where the logical answer didn't appear, but circumstances worked out even better. For example, people often lose jobs and have to redirect their lives. They come out with better jobs that fit their spiritual goals.]*

- For those of you in a cycle of sin, this will give you power to resist those negative thoughts that say, “Things will never get better.” “You’re stuck.” “You can’t change—you’re a loser.” “You’re not happy now, so you might as well do what you want to—go ahead, sin.” “It’s too hard—I’m not super-Christian.”

Sin and depression stay away from those who can look beyond their circumstances and find hope. Don’t focus on what is, but focus on what God can do and has done in the past.

## **VI. Pain comes prior to the prize**

Sorry to break this to you, but the Christian life can be full of pain. There’s not one leader in the Bible who didn’t experience it. Even Jesus had to go through the cross. In this week’s lesson, Samson had to perform for the Philistines. He was blind and helpless. And it was at a service dedicated to a false God. He was in physical, emotional, and spiritual pain.

### **Application:**

- Stick it out. Running from God will not stop the pain. It will only prolong it or delay it.
- Pain in your life does not mean that God isn’t watching or listening. Breaking any cycle of sin or doing the right thing often brings hard circumstances. Don’t stop in the middle. Keep trusting God through the tough times.

*[Tell a story about someone you know who overcame tough circumstances. Or use someone like Joni Erickson Tada who is a paraplegic with a dynamic ministry.]*

- Pain is a problem—and all will experience it, especially if you are in a sin cycle. But you can either let it draw you closer to God or away from Him. Resist the temptation to pull away and get angry and judgmental of God. This will only lead to more sin and a deeper pit of pity.
- For those who draw near to God, He will save and bless. You’ll be able to break the cycle of bitterness in your heart and help others too. Thus, you’ll be an encourager for those caught in sin.

### **Slide #8 2 Corinthians 1:3-5**

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.*

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## Tool #4 Talk: *What Costume Are You Wearing?*

**Main Point:** Who is God calling you to be? What costume are you trying to wear instead?

**Objective:**

- Learn that the Israelites were constantly being a people they were not meant to be
- Realize God calls us to be set apart, just like the Israelites were

### I. **Playing dressup**

#### Slide #1 Costumes

Why do you think people like Halloween? The obvious reason is for the candy, but what about the costumes? Why do people go and make fools of themselves and like getting dressed up? Why is it that young girls like to play dressup? Why do young boys love capes and swords? What is it about putting on a costume that gets some of us so excited? I think that there is something to be said about this. I think that people like getting dressed up because they like being someone that they are not. Boys love to dress up like comic book characters like Spiderman, Batman, and Superman while girls love to dress up like a Disney Princess, maybe a butterfly, or a fairy. By putting on the costume for one hour or for one night we're able to become a different person for that little bit of time.

In Chapter 8 of *The Story* we see the Israelites putting on a costume of their own. God has called them to be a nation set apart for His glory, a culture or a group of people very different from everyone else around them. But they forget about that and they become just like everyone else. God calls us today as Christians to be the same way, a group of people set apart, a group of people very different than the rest of the world. People who are different than the other students walking around in our schools, in our neighborhoods, everywhere we go. I have two questions for you all:

- Who has God called you as an individual to be, and how does He want you to be different?
- If you aren't that person, what costume are you trying to wear instead?

### II. **Israel had already been warned**

In this chapter of *The Story* we're again dealing with a hard time for the people of Israel. What has happened so far in *The Story*? The Israelites were taken out of Egypt by God through a man named Moses to come and they are rescued from slavery. God tells them again about this Promised Land, the land flowing with milk and honey. The nation goes through a very hard time, a time where they are wandering through the wilderness trying to find the Promised Land. They finally see the Promised Land, but someone else is in it! And last week we heard about God fighting the battle to

win the Promised Land for this nation of people through a guy named Joshua. This week in *The Story* the Israelites are now in the Promised Land, they've finally made it, but they begin to have some trouble.

God had warned the Israelites before they even got to Canaan many, many times what they were supposed to do when they finally arrived there, basically giving them a warning. Back in Deuteronomy Chapter 7, this is what God tells the Israelites to do.

**Slide #2 Deuteronomy 7:1-5**

### III. A vicious cycle continues

And we read in the first part of Chapter 8 in *The Story* on page 85 that the Israelites did not do what God had warned them they should do.

**Slide #3 Judges 2:10-13**

And what he said would happen has happened. They have begun to worship the pagan idols because they did not destroy them and get rid of them. This right here begins a vicious cycle that the Israelites go through in this chapter of *The Story*. The Israelites turn away from God, they forget about Him and they begin to worship pagan gods, the gods of the culture that they are in the midst of.

Let's read to see what happens, if you keep reading on p. 85 of *The Story* or Judges 2:14-15.

**Slide #4 Judges 2:14-15**

So basically God's hand of protection was not over Israel because they had put this other culture in place of God; they had forgotten about Him all together. And like it says they were very distressed by this, continuing on p. 85 of *The Story*, God provides judges who save the Israelites from their distress, they help them get out of their bad situation.

**Slide #5 Judges 2:16**

So we look at three different judges in this chapter of *The Story* – Deborah, Gideon, and Samson. There were more than just those, but for this chapter those are the three that are highlighted. The problem is that the Israelites kept going into this cycle of sinning against God, God taking away His protection, the Israelites crying out for help, God providing a judge to save them, and then when the judge goes away, the Israelites are back where they started. Full circle. It says this on p. 86 of *The Story*:

**Slide #6 Judges 2:17-19**

### IV. Israel traded holiness for a costume

Let's look back at the verses we were looking at a minute ago in Deuteronomy 7:1-5.

**Slide #7 Deuteronomy 7:1-5**

God goes on to say this in the next verse:

**Slide #8 Deuteronomy 7:6**

God chose the people of Israel, this nation that He had planned way back with Abraham, with Moses, with Joshua to be His treasured possession. He says “for you are a people holy to the Lord your God”. That word holy means that they are a people that will be different from any other culture and any other people around them, people that are different because they believe and love God and want to live the way that He has called them to live.

God meant for the Israelites to be one way. He meant for them to be living a totally different life than those around them. But the Israelites forgot that, they didn’t want that and they began to put on a costume of being like the culture that they were in a culture that worshipped every other god rather than the one true God. God said, be set apart, be different, be holy so that everyone around you will see that you are my treasured possession. Even though the Israelites were called to be a treasured possession they traded that in for the costume of the culture, the costume of the Canaanites.

## **V. We are God’s treasured possession**

Now here is what this looks like for us in this room, today. God calls every single one of us in this room, His treasured possession.

### **Slide #8 1 Peter 2:9-12**

It says in 1 Peter 2:9-12 that the same way that God called the Israelites to be set apart, holy for Him, and a people belonging to God, we in this room as believers in Christ Jesus, we are called to be the same exact thing! We are meant to be different in this world. God has called us to live life in a very different way than those around us, but many of us decide to put on our costumes, whether that be the costume of fitting in, the costume of most popular, the costume of compromise, the costume of just following the crowd, the list goes on and on.

- Let’s say that you and your friends are hanging out and all of them start making fun of this person at your school, calling them names, talking about them behind their back, saying bad things about that person. God has called you to be different, but will you put your costume on and join in on the hurtful things they’re saying about this person?
- You’re in the cafeteria at your school and you see a guy or girl sitting by his or herself in the room—they’re always sitting by themselves and you know they don’t have many friends or any at all. God has called you to be different or will you put your costume on and join your friends and let that person sit by themselves?
- Let’s say you are at a friend’s house and they’re telling a lie to their parents about going to another person’s house when in fact they want to do something totally different. They want you to lie to your parents too so you all can go together. God has called you to be different, but will you put your costume on and go ahead and lie to your parents?

We are not living the way that God has called us to live unless we live differently than the rest of the world. What are we doing wrong?

Here's the deal you guys, you will go through things in your life and you will watch things happen that you know are not right and there's something inside you that will tell you to be different. It's God trying to tell you something. I'm asking you today, what is God calling you to do? What is He asking you to do for Him? I can tell you He's calling all of us to live life differently, to be different for His glory. What costume are you trying to wear that keeps you from doing that?

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## Tool #5 Discussion Questions

### Icebreaker Question Collection

1. Is Samson more like a religious man or a comic-book superhero?
2. If he were a comic-book hero, his creators would bring him back to life. What would his next installment be?
3. If Samson were alive today and had long hair, what would God have him do?
4. If Samson were running for president, would he win the election? Why or why not?
5. If God gave you a superpower, any superpower, what would it be and how would you use it to glorify God?
6. If you were given a superpower to use at school, what would it be and how would you use it to make school better for everyone?

### Discussion Question Collection

#### Questions about the need for judges and Othniel

On page 85, the text reads, *“The Lord gave [the Israelites] into the hands of raiders who plundered them. He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around whom they were no longer able to restrain. . . . They were in great distress. Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders. Yet they would not listen to their judges.”*

1. The Israelites were stubborn, ungracious, and disrespectful to God. Why do you think God kept sending judges?
2. When our friends sin in cyclical ways, doing the same wrong things over and over, do you think God will keep reaching out to our friends? When we have habitual sin in our own lives, do you think God will still reach out to you? Why is that sometimes difficult to believe?
3. Do any of you know of people who hit rock bottom because of their own poor choices? Do you think God was letting the Israelites hit rock bottom before He helped them? Why would He do that?

4. What do you think would have happened in the Canaan region if there had been ten generations in a row of Israelites who worshiped the Lord? What would the nations around them have thought?
5. Othniel was Caleb's "younger" brother. (He must have been at least close to 100.) What was the secret of Othniel's ability to overthrow the king of Aram?

### **Questions about Deborah, Barak, Sisera, and Jael**

1. Sisera had 900 iron chariots. Iron was a big weapon back then. The peoples were transitioning from bronze to iron, which was a stronger metal. Why do you think the text mentions the 900 iron chariots twice?
2. The text doesn't say why a woman is judge, but it is interesting to note that Barak didn't want to go to battle without Deborah. Why do you think he felt this way?
3. What was the consequence of his decision to take Deborah with him?
4. Do you think you sometimes miss out on God's blessings because of fear or unbelief?
5. What relation was Jael to Moses? [*She was the wife a member of a tribe founded by Moses' brother-in-law.*] The laws of hospitality were strong back then, and Jael was not an Israelite. In fact, Jael's people had a treaty with Sisera's kingdom. Why do you think she put the peg through Sisera's temple?

### **Questions about Gideon**

1. Why was Gideon thrashing wheat in a wine press? What was going on in the region?
2. Why was Gideon an unlikely judge from the world's perspective? Why was he perfect for the job in God's estimation?
3. Gideon distrusted the stories about God helping the Israelites get out of Egypt. Why?
4. Why do you think he asked for so much verification before trusting the angel? Why do you think he asked for the signs of the wet and dry fleeces?
5. Do you sometimes ask for signs from God? Why or why not? If you ask for a sign from God and it seems as if He doesn't answer, how do you feel?
6. In general, how do Christians today seek answers from God?
7. In the last chapter, we read that God honored Joshua by making the sun stand still. Why do you think God honored Joshua's and Gideon's requests for signs?
8. Why did God want Gideon to go into battle with so few men?
9. Gideon gets even more reassurance from God when God tells him to go with Purah and listen at the enemy camp on the night before the battle. There he

overhears a dream and gets courage to attack. Why do you think God gave Gideon so many signs of encouragement?

10. In what ways does God offer you encouragement?

### Questions about Samson

*This is really a bizarre story! Ask for general questions before asking the questions below. It's important for the students to understand what actually took place before they can process it.*

1. What evidence in Samson's life is there that the Israelites and the other cultures have mingled?
2. Like Othniel and other judges, Samson had the power of the Lord upon him. What else set Samson apart? [*His parents' vow to raise him as a Nazarite.*]
3. Samson's first wife was used by God as a reason to wage war. What do you think of that? (Page 93, fifth paragraph)
4. More bizarre things happen with the riddle about the dead lion, the donkey jawbone, and the spring appearing to give Samson water. What do you think is going on from God's perspective?
5. Samson met Delilah and fell for her. She was bribed by her countrymen to learn Samson's strength secret. At first Samson didn't trust her—and with good reason. She tried to have him taken captive. Why do you think he finally told her about cutting his hair even after knowing she was on the other side?
6. What were Samson's obvious flaws and sins?
7. Why do you think God tied Samson's power to his hair? Why did God treat Samson differently than He did Moses or Joshua or other leaders?
8. When Samson asked for his power back one last time, what happened? In what way was this a victory? In what way was it a tragedy?
9. Would you want Samson for a school principal? A state governor? A president? Why do you think God chose him to rule Israel for 20 years?
10. Everyone has character flaws. Do you believe that God can use you, even with your flaws? What do you think matters most to God?

### Extra Credit Questions

1. When the Israelites had strong judges, did it make a difference?
2. Why were the judges successful or not?
3. Why do you think the Israelites were on 40-year cycles of obedience then 40 years of idolatry?
4. This chapter illustrates very different judges. Which one are you most like? What is the common thread between the judges?

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## Tool #6 Chapter Summary

### Timeless Truth: The Call vs. The Culture – an Eternal Problem

The nation of Israel had a place to call home at last. Settling into the Promised Land enabled them to leave behind their wandering ways and fulfill one of the key promises to Abraham: a land for God's people to occupy. But, failing to evict the Canaanites from the land, these pagan neighbors became a toxic influence on a nation called to be different.

After the death of Joshua, God's people felt this pull of worldly culture and a destructive pattern emerged:

- Israel turned again and again to the worship of pagan gods.
- God brought divine judgment.
- Israel cried out for God's help.
- God raised up a judge to save them.

This cycle of sin became the pattern of life in Israel for the next 300 years.

Early on, Israel was conquered by the Canaanite king, Jabin. God appointed Deborah, a prophet, judge, and strong leader to deliver her people. She and her military leader, Barak, defeated the powerful Canaanite army led by Sisera. He escaped and took refuge in the tent of a woman named Jael, who killed him while he slept. Israel had been delivered for now, but the cycle would continue.

Israel was later oppressed by the Midianites. God called Gideon out of nowhere to deliver His people. Gideon was pretty sure that God has mistaken him for some well-built four-star Israelite commander, and asked twice for a miraculous sign. God confirmed His intentions, and Gideon gathered 32,000 troops to take on the vast Midianite army. God, however, trimmed their forces to just 300 men. He used them to rout the Midianites, and the people enjoyed freedom...for a while.

The cycle continued, and Israel was soon dominated by the Philistines. This time God prepared a deliverer by promising a child to a barren woman. This child, Samson, was to be raised as a Nazirite, who was set apart to God. His hair was not to be cut and he was to drink no wine. He was well known for his superhuman strength and less than super character, especially in the company of beautiful women. His second wife, Delilah, betrayed him by cutting his hair so he would forfeit his advantage and God's favor. Samson himself embodied this insidious cycle that had enslaved Israel, with his saw-tooth history of indiscretions and victories.

As a result, the Philistines took him captive and gouged out his eyes. But his hair grew back, and his strength returned. Samson's last day was his best one. He was brought into the Philistine temple to entertain their leaders. He prayed to the LORD, collapsed the pillars of the temple and defeated the Philistines at last.

God is never bashful about His intentions for His people. He never tolerates sin and, at the same time, never breaks His covenant with His people. Israel may not have fully understood God's discipline, but over and over He had to bring them to their knees in order to bring them to Himself.