



Sermon – October 17, 2021
Phillip Bethancourt

Verses Covered This Week

Judges 2:6 - 16

As you grab your seats, let me invite you to open your Bible with me. We're going to be in the book of Judges this morning. Judges chapter 2, starting verse 6. If you're a guest with us this morning, whether in the room or catching it online, welcome home. We come to God's word every day, every week, declaring what we just sang. That Jesus reigns forever. That He is alive and His word is living and active. It's one of the reasons I'm excited that after the service today, we're going to be starting our last New Member Workshop of 2021. So if you haven't yet taken that step to become a part of our faith family, I want to encourage you to consider doing that in the response time after the message today. Now this is week 2 in our new series, Every Generation Reaching the Next Generation. And if you weren't here last week, we started in Psalm 78 where the psalmist sets the scene for us about what it looks like to have a heart for the next generation. He gave us this picture of how it looks like to declare God's faithfulness to them and to foster God's faithfulness in the next generation. But if you were here with us last Sunday, you remember that this passage in verse 8 ended with a warning. That Israel in the next generation should not be like Israel in the past generation. And what it pointed to was the past reality of God's people walking away from God's design, rebelling against Him in unfaithfulness. And in Judges 2 this morning, that's exactly what we're going to see play out. We're going to see how it is that Israel got to that point that the psalmist is addressing things in that way in Psalm 78. And what we're going to see along the way is what is at stake if we fail to be a church that focuses on the reality that we must have every generation reaching the next generation.

So I want you to see how this text begins. We're going to start in Judges chapter 2, beginning in verse 6 if you'll follow along with me.

⁶When Joshua dismissed the people, the people of Israel each went to his own inheritance to take possession of the land. ⁷And 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. ⁸And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of 110 years. ⁹And they buried him within the boundaries of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash. ¹⁰And 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.

Let's pray together.

Father, even now in this moment, would You quiet our hearts? Would you take our restless spirits and fix them on Jesus and would You take our hearts that are so prone to wander, so prone to complacency and instead, fuel us with commitment with a relentless passion for Your name. And we trust that You can do this through the power and the blood of Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Well, have you ever had a situation where you thought it was one of the worst moments of your life? But it turned out in retrospect to be one of the best. I remember something like that happening for me when I was a sophomore in high school. You see, my family moved 11 times growing up and we lived in exile in the state of Connecticut for 6 years. A Texas in the north east. It's as tragic as you can imagine. And as I came into my sophomore year, we got the notice from my dad that it was time for another move and I was devastated. Because I had everything going for me there. Everything I wanted in high school was right there in front of me. And it felt like God was taking it all away; one of the worst moments of my life. But as I look back now, I am grateful. Because it turned out to be one of the most providential, best moments of my life and here's why. See, we were part of a small church there up in Connecticut; one that faithfully taught the Bible. Had people volunteering and serving. Was living out its mission in its community. And the youth group I was in was led by two lay leaders; a volunteer man and woman. And in the year after I left, our family moved away and the next year where at the time that church, the pastor was caught embezzling money and he was fired. The lay leader man and woman who were leading this youth group were found to be in an inappropriate relationship with each other and they were dismissed. And all the friends that I grew up around in that church who were locked into the church, became disillusioned, disengaged. And what seemed like one of the worst moments of my life, to have all that was going for me taken away, what I look back on now, I recognize it was God's kindness to spare me in my young and fragile faith from the type of trauma that my friends went through. It's been on my mind a lot lately because not long ago I got to connect for the first time with one of those friends I hadn't seen in 20 years. His name was Josh. And we were reminiscing about the good old days and Josh told me about how our family introduced him to some Texas delicacies like Blue Bell ice cream and Dr. Pepper. He said he also remembered being at our house on the weekends. You couldn't get an Aggie football game up there in the northeast. And so at time, we couldn't even get it on the radio. But my dad found some way you could call in a pay-per-listen phone number and pick up Dave South's voice giving the radio broadcast through your phone line in New Fairfield, Connecticut. He reminded me I was a hardcore Aggie even back in my teenage years. He was the youth group rock star, the one we all looked up to, the guy who, man, he was just a model. Everybody wanted to be like him. Which was why it was so challenging to sit across a table from him 20 years later and see that he has nothing to do with God in his life now. You see, that embezzlement, that illicit relationship, later on a bad international missions experience, caused him to walk away from the church during his college years. And the reality is, Josh is not alone. In fact, you'll see on the screens in just a moment a slide with some statistics. There was a study done not long ago of people that had grown up in church who were being interviewed in their late 20's about what happened to their faith during the college-aged years from 18 to 22. And

you'll notice on this first slide, it gives some details about what happened to those who walked away from the church during college. You'll notice one of the first things it says is that, out of those who grew up on the church, 2/3 of them walked away from church during the college years for at least one year of their life. And for those that moved to college, just like many Aggies come here to Texas A&M, nearly half of them, the reason they walked away was because of that transition to college, leaving the comfort of their home church. But notice that last statistic there. It tells us that 71%, 7 out of 10, it wasn't by design but by accident. It wasn't an intentional departure. They didn't flee the church, they just faded from it. Josh is not alone in our culture. He's not alone in our churches.

But notice the next slide because it also asks questions of those who stayed while they were in college. And there's three main reasons that they gave. You'll see over half of them said that they stayed in church because they knew that church was foundational for them to have a solid relationship with God. And another half of them said that they stayed in church because they knew that the church could shape the decisions that they were making in a way that pleased God. And perhaps most importantly for the text that we're going to see in Judges 2 this morning is that last one. That over 40% of them, the reason that they stayed connected is because they saw a faithful parent or family member or friend model what faithful engagement with the church looked like. So these realities that we're coming to this morning serve as a reminder of a key question for us that is coming out of Judges chapter 2 which is this. Do we truly understand what's at stake if our church fails to be a church where every generation is reaching the next generation? Because when we look at the life of Israel, we recognize the truth that still holds true today. That we are always one generation from losing the Gospel. It was right there in the life of Israel. And if the next generation walks away from the Gospel, we remember it is ultimately their responsibility. But what we need to recognize this morning is that we have a hand in that. That our lifestyle, our decisions, our engagement can affect what happens with the next generation.

And notice the way it plays out here in Judges 2. That's why we're looking at this text. This about what's taking place here. Moses has died. Joshua is now passing away. The elders who were leading the country and the nation with him are passing away. There is this generational shift that is taking place. And in the midst of that generational shift, we see some realities that confront us with the high stakes of why we must be a church that never loses sight of God's design that every generation is called to reach the next generation. And here's what we're going to notice this morning as we work our way through Judges chapter 2. We're going to see how failures in our generation can lead to or contribute to the fall of the next generation. And I want you to notice the first way that can happen back in verses 6 through 10. You'll see the way that Judges 2 shows us that complacency in this generation can lead to entitlement in the next generation. So let's pick back up where the text begins here when it speaks about this generational shift. You don't just see a change in generations, but a change in heart. A heart that is manifested in the complacency of the people of God. And you know what complacency is. It's that smug satisfaction with your situation. Where your accomplishments can enable apathy. And what this text is going to show us is that this complacency takes root in the life of Israel in this generation. And it happens in the same way that complacency so often occurs in our own lives. It's not by design or intention. Nobody sets out in their future to become complacent. Instead, there's that slow, steady slide where we look up one day and the passion that once fueled us has been replaced with the flatness in our pursuit of the things of God.

And how does this complacency happen in the life of Israel and our life today? Well notice several things here in the text. You'll see, to begin with, that complacency happens when we shift our focus from our warfare to our welfare. So notice how that happens in verse 6.

[⁶When Joshua dismissed the people; the people of Israel went each to his inheritance to take possession of the land.](#)

That's the first step towards complacency. When we shift our focus from our warfare to our welfare. And where do we see that in verse 6? Well, look back towards the end when it says there, to take possession. That image is to finish the fight. They have already begun defeating their enemies and now they are bringing it to fulfilment. And you can image the people of Israel going to their territories, conquering their enemies, finishing the battles, settling down, isolating themselves from the other tribes. And as they settle down so do their hearts, so does their passion, so does their commitment. Back in World War II, America recognized the need for additional military airports around the country. And one of them was Bergstrom Air Force Base right on the southeastern edge of Austin. And it was a military airport for over 50 years. But in 1993, Bergstrom, along with many others in our country, were decommissioned from functioning as a military airport. And in the case of Bergstrom, it was converted into a civilian airport. When you fly out of Austin, you'll go to Austin-Bergstrom Airport. It took once was meant for the warfare of our country and it's now being used for the welfare of our country. As a matter of fact, they took the headquarters of the 12th division of the Air Force and took that headquarters building and turned it into a hotel. You see this visual image of moving from commitment to comfort. And Judges 2 is reminding us that same danger was there for Israel and it can be for you and me. That if we prize our comfort over our spiritual commitment, it can drive us to a complacency that not only affects us in this generation, but draws us towards entitlement in the next generation. But notice what happens next. It's not just shifting from warfare to welfare, we also see how complacency happens when today's service relies on yesterdays successes. So look at how it talks about it in verse 7.

[⁷And 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.](#)

And on the one hand, this should be encouraging. They're looking back and seeing God's faithfulness. The faithfulness of their service for Him. The faithfulness of His great works. But I don't want you to miss a small phrase at the end of this verse that you might overlook. When it talks about that great work, it says, who had seen all the great work that the Lord had done. You see that phrase, had done? That's in the past tense. It's pointing back to what God had done yesterday. And they were carrying out God's service today living on the accolades and successes of the past. They had remember what He had done in the past generation and that caused them to look, take their sight off of what He was doing in this generation and what He might do in the next generation. And that's one of the other ways we can be drawn towards a complacency. When we get so fixed on what God has done in the past that we get complacent about what He might do in the future. And there's a warning there for us. There's a danger in a legacy church like Central with a nearly 100 year history of God's faithfulness. We've seen Him move generation after generation, decade after decade. But the danger for us is the same as Israel. That we might live off the past rather than live in the present. That we might live off of

yesterday's successes to drive today's service. And if that's true, it can lead us to the same type of complacency that we see here in the life of Israel in Judge's 2.

But I want you to notice one other factor here in this text that can pull us towards complacency. Because starting in verse 8, we see how complacency happens when the last generation takes for granted its investment in the next generation's leaders. So notice how this leadership transition plays out in verses 8 to 10. It says:

⁸And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of 110 year. ⁹And they buried him in the boundaries of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash. ¹⁰And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers.

Now the scholars of this time period will tell you that this length of time that's being described here in Judges 2 was about 30 years. In other words, it was about one generation for Joshua to pass away, for the elders surrounding him to pass away, and for that come behind them to step up in their place. They had great moments while Joshua and the other leaders were still alive, but what becomes clear from this text is that the last generation was not intentional in investing in the leaders of the next generation. You remember when Moses passed away, he had raised up Joshua to follow in his place. And now as Joshua passes away, who's the next one to lead? Where are the next generation leaders? Where are the ones that the last generation have poured their life into? It seems to me that the complacency of the moment caused them to cruise to the finish rather than investing in that next generation. You see there's a pattern that shows up here in Judges 2 where with Joshua, they articulate God's design for God's people. With the surrounding leaders who are still alive after him, they assume God's design for God's people. But when the next generation comes, they abandon God's design for God's people. It moves from articulate to assume to abandon. And let me tell you, Central family, that same danger still exists today. That we might be in our generation, those who articulate the Gospel, stand on biblical truth, but we might raise up a next generation in our complacency who assumes that Gospel, who takes it for granted, who doesn't live all in with it. And as a result of that, a generation will come behind them potentially just like this one that follows Joshua that moves from assuming the Gospel to abandoning it entirely. That's what's at stake if we're not a church that is committed to every generation reaching the next generation.

So what happens in response to this complacency? Look on with me at verse 10. We'll see that this generation's complacency enables the next generation's entitlement. So look at how it describes it there at the second part of verse 10.

¹⁰And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the work of the Lord or the work that He had done for Israel.

So where do we see this picture of entitlement here? You'll see this next generation comes. And notice, they're enjoying all the benefits of the people of God living out the design of God without the belief or the behavior that brought them. Now where do we see that? Well, we see they've abandoned the beliefs. It tells us there in verse 10 towards the end, they did not know the Lord. And they abandoned the behavior because it tells us there at the end of the verse that they had

forgotten the work that He had done. That's what entitlement is. It's like one of my friends say, entitlement is somebody who's born on 3rd base and thinks they hit a triple. That's what you see here in the life of Israel. And I don't need to convince you that we are living in a culture where we're watching the younger generation all around us marked by entitlement, a disrespect for elders, a disregard for others, a demand for better treatment. It's easy to spot that entitlement all around us. But you know what's harder to notice? The complacency amongst you and me that enables that entitlement. The coddling, the control, the complacency. Judges 2:10 is the fruit of Judges, verses 6 through 9. The complacency of the last generation fuels the entitlement of the next generation. But I want you to see something else. Because we're going to go a few more verses in this passage. And we're going to see that the complacency in our generation doesn't just lead to entitlement, it also leads to idolatry.

So notice how verses 11 through 13 go on here. It says,

¹¹The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals.

¹²And they abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the LORD to anger.

¹³They abandoned the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth.

You see, what's happening here is not only is that next generation marked by entitlement, it's also marked by idolatry. And both of those things come because of complacency. It reminds me of this statement that Ronald Reagan once made. He said this: Freedom is never more than one generation from extinction. So let me take the fuller quote from Reagan. And instead of talking about American freedom, let me talk about us holding fast to the Gospel. Here's how we paraphrase him. Our belief in the Gospel is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same. Or one day, one day, we will spend our sunset years telling our children and our children's children what it was once like in our church when we actually embraced the Gospel. That's what we see happening in the life of Israel. There's this abandonment of God's design. It shows up in entitlement and it shows up here in idolatry. And what does this idolatry look like? We see this marking the entire Old Testament as the people of God fashion false gods to worship in place of the true God. It involves both abandonment and allegiance. Leaving and loving. They turn from God and the problem with idolatry, the Old Testament shows us, is not just the false Gods we fashion with our hands, it's the false gods that are carved on our hearts. They turn from God in idolatry. And notice what happens as the next generation turns to idolatry. Look at the way it shapes their direction. You'll see in verse 11 that idolatry causes the next generation to pursue a different purpose. It's why it says, the people of Israel did was what evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals. All it took was one generation to turn away from God's design and to begin to live for a different purpose. They move from serving God to serving idols. And what verse 11 shows us is that this action is not just one of disobedience, but of defiance. They are turning away from God's purpose and design for their life. That's one of the reasons why I've enjoyed this past week getting those 6 A.M. text alerts in that Word 511 reading plan we've been going through. And Psalm 119 had a word for us this morning when it said to us,

I will not forget the word of the Lord.

Well, that's exactly what Israel had done. They had forgotten His word. They had forgotten His design. They had forgotten His purpose. That's what happens when idolatry invades the next generation. But notice, in addition to that, idolatry also causes the next generation to pursue different priorities. That's why verses 12 and 13 talk about how they abandoned the Lord, who brought them out of Egypt. Verse 13 says, they abandoned Him and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth. All it took was one generation, not just to abandon His purpose, but also His priorities. They took away their trust from the God of this universe and instead put it in the Gods of the surrounding cultures. Whatever we trust, we prioritize. Who were they trusting? It says, the Baals and the Ashtaroth. This false God Baal is used over 70 times. He was the storm god. The one who controlled the weather and therefore could provide the blessing of the crops. Ashtaroth, she was the fertility God who would provide them their offspring. So you have these gods that provide the deepest needs of a culture in that moment; both children and crops. Rain and reproduction. They look to these gods to provide what only God of the universe can provide for them. And as a result of that, they don't just lose their purpose, they lose their priorities. And notice what happens when we lose sight of our purpose and our priorities. Then we see back in verse 12 that idolatry can also cause the next generation to pursue a different path. So look in the middle of verse 12 when he says there:

¹²...They went after other gods from among the gods of the people who were around them, and bowed down to them. And provoked the Lord to anger.

So in that generation, in one generation alone, they don't just lose sight of why they're living, they don't just lose sight of what they should be prioritizing, they lose sight of where they're going. They take their eyes off of God and it tells us there in verse 12 they went after other gods. They followed the path to somewhere else, away from God's design and to their own desires. And that happens not just in the life of Israel. That happens in every generation that walks away from God. When complacency in our generation enables idolatry in the next generation it's going to show up in a different purpose, in different priorities, in a different path. And I don't need to convince you this morning that we can look around the younger generation in our culture and perhaps even in our churches, and we don't just see that entitlement, we also see this idolatry. People are running after the false gods of success or significance or claiming that all roads lead to God instead of understanding the exclusivity of Jesus Christ. It can show up in many different forms. We see a prodigal generation around us, don't we? But I can't help but wonder within our churches if the prodigal generation we see coming up behind us may have to do with the prodigal parents who they saw in their homes and their churches. And maybe that last generation weren't prodigals in the sense that they, y'all went away and we went away to a far country to squander our inheritance. Maybe instead, what our prodigal journey didn't look like Luke 15. Maybe it looked like Revelation 2. Jesus' warning to the church at Ephesus that you have left your first love. There's one of our young married life groups and the guys were having a conversation in it not long ago and they talked about how when they graduated, when they left the home, when their parents were empty-nesters, about 20% of them, after all the kids left the home, their parents totally disengaged from the church. They walked away from what their parents raised them. And perhaps you have lived in that situation. And these adults now were baffled by the reality that generation that came before them. They said one thing to them each Sunday of their childhood but now they're living something entirely different. They are walking away from what they had claimed was so important. And that same danger that we see

in Judges 2 with the nation of Israel in the last generation can show up today. That we go through the motions, we walk with complacency, we do it as long as we have to, and then as soon as those kids are out of the home or as soon as that accountability partner moves away, or as soon as something changes in the church that we don't like, there can be this apathy, this complacency that grips us.

But God is not mocked. When He sees the next generation's idolatry, He responds in two significant ways and you'll see it there in verse 14. You'll see that He firsts responds in retribution. He says,

¹⁴So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them. And He sold them into the hand of the surrounding enemies, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. ¹⁵Whenever they marched out, the hand of the Lord was against them for harm, as the Lord had warned, and as the Lord had sworn to them. And they were in terrible distress.

See, the text tells us that God responds to the idolatry of the next generation first in judgment. There is a retribution and accountability. The righteous anger of God is provoked by the unrighteous living of His people. God now fights against His unfaithful people in their sinful rebellion. And that same judgment, that same punishment, that same accountability is what you and I each face apart from Jesus Christ. That in our sins we have run from God. And while He is our heavenly Father for those that seek Him, He is also that faithful judge who will hold us accountable for our sins apart from Jesus Christ. There is that promise of retribution that is nestled here in Judges chapter 2. But I don't want you to think that that's the only way that God reacts to our sin. That that's the only way He responds to our idolatry. Look at the way that verse 16 sets the stage for the rest of this book. And in fact, lays the groundwork for the promise of the Gospel we have in Jesus Christ. God doesn't just bring retribution, He brings restoration. And it tells us about it in verse 16 when it says,

¹⁶Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them.

So God doesn't just bring judgment, He brings the judges. God doesn't just bring, meet their disobedience with condemnation, He meets their disobedience with deliverance. And that's a patten that's laid out here with all sorts of unlikely God-empowered, warrior saviors, who rescue the people from the punishment of their sin. You look through the book of Judges, you'll see the story of a man like Ehud; a left-handed assassin who stabs his knife. He pierces the side of the king to bring about deliverance. You'll see the story of this warrior princess, Jael, who when the men of Israel fail, takes a tent peg and cracks it into the head of the enemy king to deliver God's people. Or you can see them speaking about the story of Samson who brings judgment upon the foes of God by destroying the temple where collapses upon them in judgment. And in each act of deliverance, each moment of salvation, even though it lasted for a season in the Old Testament, it was pointing ahead to what one day God would do for us in Jesus Christ. The man who would come, and just like that sword from Ehud, He would be pierced in His side for our transgression. And just as that tent peg was driven into the head of that enemy king, Jesus has those spikes driven into His hands and feet on that cross as He dies for you and me. And just as Samson destroys the temple to bring judgment on the people of God, Jesus tells us, "Destroy the

temple.” And in 3 days through His resurrection, He will rebuild it. These judges are giving us glimpses of the glorious salvation that we can have in Jesus Christ. And that should fuel our church to walk faithfully in the days ahead.

When I was catching up with my friend Josh, one of the questions I asked him is, hey, out of all the people that came through our youth group in that time period, how many of them, now 20 years later, would you say are still connected to a church. You know what his answer was? Very few. Very few. The complacency of one generation contributed to the next generation walking away from the Gospel. But one of the other things I loved about my time with Josh is we didn't just take a look back at our time together growing up. We also reminisced about his dad for a while. His dad was name, Jerry Surface. Jerry Surface worked a forgettable desk job for a technology company. But his love for the church and his family was unlike just about any other example I saw as a kid. He poured himself into his family. He poured himself into this church. He helped pick up the pieces after this embezzlement, after this elicit relationship. He poured himself out for year after year after year. And let me tell you what Jerry Surface got in return. Pain, disappointment, heartbreak. You pour yourself out for a church that's now falling apart. You pour yourself into three boys who have all walked away from the church as prodigals. Jerry Surface died within the last couple years. I can't help but wonder if he went to his grave disappointed. Spend all these years pouring yourself out and you don't get to see the fruit of the next generation. That's one of the reasons why I've got this deep regret. I never had the chance to tell Jerry how he changed my life. See, when I was a teenager in that youth group, before we moved, he's the first man in my life outside my family who came around side me, alongside me, and invested in me spiritually in an intentional way. Now, look, it wasn't much. He took me to donuts and we talked about Jesus. It wasn't hard. It wasn't a program. But what I saw in him was a man who loved Jesus enough that he wanted me to love Jesus too. And even though he searched for years, waiting for the prodigals to come home in his own family, he never saw them. And even though he searched to see that church regain the glory days or what it used to have, he probably never saw it. But what he might have missed in the middle of all that pain, in the middle of all that failure, was that he was faithful in planting seeds in a life like mine. It helped to shape the direction of my life forever. And because he wasn't willing to be complacent, but instead, he was faithful, he is helping even now to shape the next generation of a church he's never seen and will never know this side of heaven. And as we look to this warning in Judges 2, we need to remember this reality. That we are always one generation away from losing the Gospel. And that's why we're called to walk, not with complacency in these days, but in commitment. Trusting that as God sustains us He will help us reach the next generation.

Let's pray together.

Father, I don't know the hearts of every person in this room. Some may be here for the very first time. Some here for decades, Lord, but I know that our hearts are prone towards hardness. That the brokenness of sin can build calluses on us that drive us towards complacency rather than commitment. And I pray that by the power of Your Spirit and through the message of Your word that You will use that to strip away any hardheartedness, hardheartedness in our lives. That instead, that we will find ourselves on a path just as You call us to here in Judges 2. To not become weary in doing good, trusting that at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Lord, may You find our generation faithful in doing everything we can to reach the next generation. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.