

LOVING JESUS, LOVING PEOPLE, PLOWING A COUNTER-CULTURE

[Spring Season: April 12 – June 14 | Fall Season: September 27 – December 6]

LEADER DETAILS

- **MAIN TEXT:** Judges 13:1-25
- **MAIN IDEA:** God rescues people even when they are not pursuing Him, but spiritual gifting without devotion leads to a wasted life.
- **GROWTH FOCUS:** Practice re-directing the conversation away from over-sharing and rabbit trails.
- **ICE-BREAKER:** If you could instantly become an expert at one skill or hobby, what would it be and why?

ANNOUNCEMENTS (Full details at: emergence.church/digital-bulletin)

- **Totowa Updates** – The new eKids is open, we are in the temporary auditorium, and we have new service times! **Keep updated on changes here:** <https://emergence.church/totowa-updates>
- **Baptism Services – This WEEKEND** – Let's be praying for our baptism services this weekend at both campuses - peace and joy for those getting baptized, and for God to move in power as those in attendance hear the testimony of God's faithfulness in the lives of others!
- **College-ish - Mondays in Totowa @ 7:00pm - June 1 – July 6**
 - **The Why** - College-ish is a six-week session for young adults from ages 18-25 to grow, connect, and learn more about Jesus. For those who are staying local as we head towards Fall, the hope is for this to also serve as a bridge into a community group for long-term connection and discipleship.

GETTING STARTED:

- **Pray:** This helps everyone prepare their heads and hearts as you turn to the discussion.
 - **Watch Community Extras Video** (length 3:48 – questions from video are included below)
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LAST WEEK'S GROWTH STEP FOLLOW-UP:

[Leaders: These follow-ups are meant to offer some accountability while being low-pressure. Keep it casual, "If you were able to try this last week, how did it go?" Sharing is optional; it's always okay to pass.]

- **Outward Action:** Encourage or pray for someone this week who feels weak, discouraged, or afraid.
- **Inward Prayer:** Ask God to reveal any area where success, comfort, pride, fear, or self-reliance may be slowly pulling your heart away from dependence on Him.

SERMON DISCUSSION

Prioritize meaningful conversation over getting through every question.

God Still Comes Down

Read Judges 13:1-5

For the first time in Judges, the familiar cycle breaks down. Israel never cries out to God for help. After forty years under Philistine rule, they seem to have simply accepted their slavery as normal. Yet God refuses to abandon His people. Pastor Ryan said “even when their cries don't go up, God still comes down.” Many of our stories begin the same way, not with us pursuing God, but with God graciously pursuing us.

- Why do you think Israel stopped crying out to God, and what can we learn from that?
- Looking back, where have you seen God "come down" for you even when you weren't crying out to Him? (video)

Knowing vs. Doing

Read Judges 13:8-16

After hearing God's instructions, Manoah asks for the messenger to return and teach them what to do. But when the angel comes back, he simply repeats what has already been said. Throughout the chapter, Manoah keeps asking for more, while seeming to miss what God has already revealed. Pastor Ryan pointed out that we can fall into the same trap, looking for a “special word” while neglecting the clear instructions He's already given in His Word.

- What are some things God has already made clear in Scripture that Christians commonly struggle to obey?
- Where are we tempted to look for shortcuts in our relationship with God instead of faithfully walking with Him? What does that cost us? (video)

Letting Faith Lead

Read Judges 13:17-23

Manoah asks the angel for his name so that he can honor him *after* his words come true. Pastor Ryan pointed out that this reveals something about Manoah's heart: he wants certainty before trust and proof before honor. But biblical faith works the other way around. Faith trusts God's character before the outcome is visible.

- Read John 20:24-29. What similarities and differences do you see between Thomas and Manoah? What does Jesus' response to Thomas teach us about faith, doubt, and God's grace?

[Leaders: Both Manoah and Thomas struggle to trust before seeing. In both passages, Scripture affirms that faith before sight is better than faith after proof. Yet notice how Jesus responds to Thomas. He doesn't shame or reject him; He graciously meets him in his weakness and helps him move forward in faith. As believers mature, the goal is not to eliminate every question or struggle, but to increasingly trust God's character and promises even when we don't yet see the outcome.]

- Where in your life is God asking you to trust His character and promises rather than waiting until everything makes sense?

Great Potential, Little Fruit

Read Judges 13:24-25

The chapter ends with great promise. Samson is blessed by God, empowered by the Spirit, and possesses more natural gifting than any judge before him. Yet Samson becomes a tragic example of someone with extraordinary potential who accomplishes surprisingly little. Pastor Ryan warned that gifting, talent, opportunity, and potential are never substitutes for a genuine walk with God. Samson would ultimately fail where Jesus would succeed. Samson only began Israel's deliverance; Jesus accomplished a complete rescue from sin, Satan, and death.

- Why do you think people often confuse gifting, success, or ability with spiritual maturity?
 - As you evaluate your own life, where are you most tempted to rely on your gifts and abilities rather than your relationship with God?
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GROWTH STEP THIS WEEK

- **Outward Action:** Identify someone who may be drifting spiritually and take a step toward them this week through encouragement, prayer, or an honest conversation.
 - **Inward Prayer:** Ask God, *"Where am I seeking the benefits of following you without the trust, surrender, and obedience that following you requires?"*
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PRAYER PROMPTS:

- Thank God that He pursues people even when they are not pursuing Him.
 - Ask God for faith to trust Him before you see the outcome.
 - Pray for a deeper love for God's Word and a greater willingness to obey it.
 - Ask God to help you prioritize character and devotion over gifting, talent, or success.
 - Thank Jesus for being the greater Deliverer who accomplished what no judge could.
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NEXT WEEK'S TEXT: Baptism Sermon (Judges will return following week!)