

FIELD-TESTED SERMON RESOURCES

SERMON SERIES

TRUSTED | BIBLICAL | FIELD-TESTED

Thank you for downloading this sample PDF from our Sermon Series line of resources.

When you stand up in front of students proclaim the Word of God, you need trusted, creative, Biblically solid content. YM360's Sermon Series is exactly what you're looking for.

Field-tested, from-the-trenches of youth ministry, YM360 Sermon Series are complete sermon outlines and graphic packages designed to help you lead students closer to God through proclaiming His Word.

SERIES OVERVIEW FOR THE CYCLE

On this side of the book of Judges, we can easily find ourselves in a judgmental stance about God's people. This series seeks to study the cycle of relationship with God, falling away, and salvation from our disobedience. We'll do this through the lens of three major players in the book of Judges, learning how to stop this cycle with us.

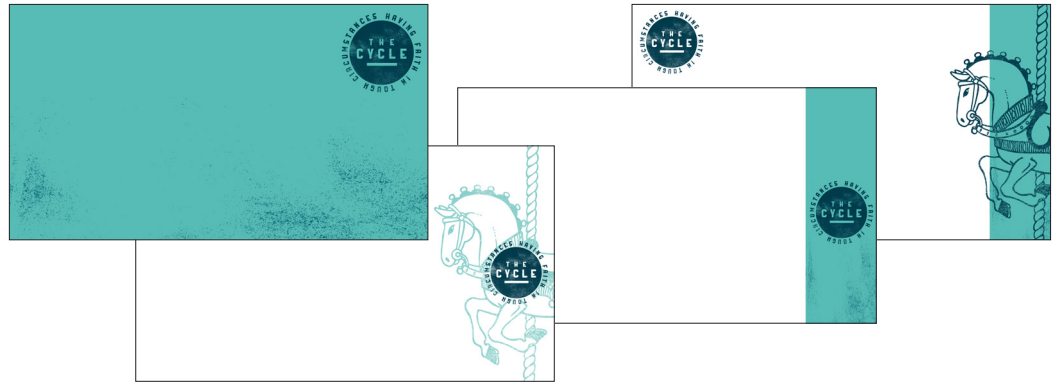
- **SESSION 1:** Where do you start in a circle? You'll open the series by saying it doesn't matter where we begin. Instead, it's about identifying the cycle so that you can break out of it.
- **SESSION 2:** Unique Doesn't Mean Flawed: Students will learn how the entire Kingdom of God is needed to break the cycle of sin.
- **SESSION 3:** Passing the Test: You'll ask students what might happen if God removed all of their obstacles. Would they still turn back?
- **SESSION 4:** The World's Strongest Weakling: The series closes by showing how it's not our strength which allows us to overcome the cycle.

The Cycle is a challenge for students to look at their lives and be willing to make a change. We are called to much more on this earth than sin, repent, worship, repeat. Let us be the generation to break the cycle.

BACKGROUND SLIDES, PROMOTIONAL ARTWORK, AND MORE . . .

Each YM360 Sermon Series comes with title and background slides, promotional art (including Instagram images), and logo treatments. Here is what to expect.

BACKGROUND AND TITLE SLIDES



PROMOTIONAL ARTWORK



INSTAGRAM IMAGES



LOGO TREATMENT



NOTE: Each YM360 Sermon Series also comes with the native files of the logo in case you want to replicate the design for other uses.

The Cycle Sermon Series Overview

The Sermon Series Overview is a one-page glimpse of the stuff you need to know to begin preparing to preach.

- **Session 1 Purpose:** Where do you start in a circle? You'll open the series by saying it doesn't matter where we begin. Instead, it's about identifying the cycle so that you can break out of it.
- **Scripture Passage(s):** Judges 2:8-23
- **Session Snapshot:** Isn't it easy to judge the foolishness of the Israelites from our perspective in history? God did some incredible things, and yet His people acted like nothing happened. Has God stopped doing incredible things, or have we stopped noticing? Perhaps we are stuck in the same cycle of disobedience as the Israelites. In this session, you will help students see why we can no longer stay in the cycle.
- **What You May Need:** Optional Illustration: image of a merry-go-round; optional illustration: image of a deer in a pool (or a Deer in pool gif)

Details on *The Cycle* Sermon Series Outlines

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How To Use the *The Cycle* Sermon Series

This sermon series outline is designed for use by a communicator in a large group setting. It provides various elements such as suggestions on illustrations or images, Scripture passages, background information, and application points that you will need to prepare your lesson. It also includes discussion questions that could be used in a small group following the message and artwork for promotion or message support.

These sermons are designed to be useful for all types of groups and churches, and you should feel free to make adjustments that benefit your particular circumstance.

I. Opening: Merry-Go-Round Illustration

- a. Have you ever been to a mall or fairground and seen a merry-go-round? The cute little circle with all of the animals and carts? I love watching children or even adults when it comes to riding them. Everyone goes about the process in a different way. Some will eye the perfect animal the entire time they are waiting in line. When their chance comes, individuals dash around the circle, trying to get to their desired steed first.

Others take the conservative approach, willing to take whatever animal is waiting for them right at the entrance. Most of the time this is because they believe it will also land near the same spot, which would mean they get off the ride first too. What I most love is when children “race.” They lean forward hoping to inch ahead of their competitors looking for any advantage over those around them.

Here's the thing about jumping on a merry-go-round though: it's a circle. You are never farther ahead of your fellow riders because you're all going in a circle. It doesn't matter if you start at the unicorn or the bear, because all of them will end up in the same place so long as they stay in the cycle of the merry-go-round.

Sometimes our lives can feel an awful lot like a merry-go-round. It feels like we are stuck. Over the next four weeks, we are going to talk about a particular cycle in Scripture we can all find ourselves in today.

II. Setup Scripture Background

- a. We are going to look at the book of Judges. Judges takes place after Joshua has led the people of Israel into the promised land. They are out of the desert, and yet we see a lack of remembrance regarding who brought them into oasis.
- b. Joshua's time is coming to a close, and people are asking who will lead next?

III. Series Setup

- a. Cycle of disobedience
 - i. Judges presents a cycle of disobedience in the nation of Israel. The people fall away from God into idol worship, God sends a judge to save them, the people repent and worship God, the judge dies, and the cycle starts over.
- b. Explain what a judge is
 - i. Not “Judge Judy”; not a court official in a black robe.
 - ii. A sort of warrior, a rescuer.
- c. Judging from a distance
 - i. It's easy to overlook and judge the Israelites from a distance because we see them amid the cycle. The reality is though; they are just a few horses up from us on the merry-go-round. When we understand we are caught in the cycle, we can begin to look for a way to break it.

- d. Before we break the cycle, we must learn where it started.

IV. Death of Joshua

- a. [Read Judges 2:8-10]
- b. The emotion
 - i. It's important to discuss the heartache occurring at this moment for God's people. They have lost yet another leader who led them into a blessed time. Moses led them out of captivity in Egypt. Joshua led them out of the struggles of the desert.
- c. The job is not done
 - i. The Israelites have not cleared out the entire promised land of all foreign enemies, and this comes into play later on in the chapter. The nation looks ahead at struggles they have in front, and yet they now seem to lack the leadership to overcome. At least they believe it seems this way.
- d. The cycle begins with a new generation
 - i. Verse 10 says there was a generation raised who did not know God or what He had done.
 1. This implies two things: Lack of storytelling and lack of worship.
 2. History is passed by storytelling, and we know narration was a part of their culture. It just seems they are choosing to leave out stories of God's wonder.
 3. It's one thing not to know the history of God; it's another to lack in knowing God. Worship practices had gone down; it appears because this new generation doesn't know Him.
 - ii. A lack of God and knowing what God has done creates the perfect setting for disobedience.

V. The Cycle of Disobedience Requires Two Things: Unfaithful Generation

- a. Optional Illustration: Fighting Couple

When I was reading this passage, it brought up a familiar scene to me. This is a scene where a couple is fighting or arguing, and yet not communicating well. It makes a comical movie/tv show sequence. The husband does something silly, and the wife retaliates out of annoyance. The husband then gets frustrated at the wife for what she's doing, and eventually the audience is witness to a massive drama filled episode. Everything could have been resolved if the parties had simply communicated clearly on the front end of things about the problem which had occurred.

You see, in the moment it's tough to realize what impact our actions and thoughts have. Yet even physics demonstrates the power of reaction, and we seem to believe this has no connection to spiritual matter. Just as the husband's initial blunder causes an intentional decision to be made by the wife, we witness an intentional decision being made in our passage.

- b. [Read Judges 2:11-15]
- c. Mentions intentionally walking astray
 - i. These verses mention seven verbs for how the Israelites turned away from their heavenly father. Whether it was through worship, bowing down, or even abandoning

God. The Israelites didn't accidentally stumble into their unfaithfulness; rather they welcomed it with their time and decisions.

- ii. They had forgotten the history of the Lord. They had forgotten how God rescued them from captivity. It's easy to focus on the bad when we forget about the good.

d. Two choices being made

i. Israel's choice

- 1. Israel chooses other gods and cultures. They choose Baal and the gods around them. They focused solely on their surroundings. In the absence of a leader, the devil pounced on an unsuspecting flock of believers.

ii. God's choice

- 1. We must make note of God's actions here. It's not a comfortable thing to read, but this shows us even more faith in how God would choose us. He's not going to keep us with Him against our will, but He certainly hopes to make it possible for us.
- 2. The anger of the Lord becomes kindled against Israel, and God gives them into their enemies. He removes their strength which is what enabled them to overcome giants. He no longer marches with them, but in fact is against them.
- 3. The Israelites are quickly reminded how they are not the ones who won the battles, and their new deities have nothing to offer them but shelf-space. The statue of Baal may serve as a blunt weapon in the hand of a man, but the power of God serves as a force which creates solar systems.
- 4. The results of these battles should come as no shock to the Israelites, because they have been properly warned. In Deut. 28:25, Scripture mentions the consequences of disobedience.
 - a. Yet we can so often get upset with the Lord. "HOW DARE HE ABANDON ME IN THIS SEASON!"
 - b. When we lose sight of Scripture, we also forget His constant warnings which guide us back toward His providence. God isn't going to keep anyone against their will, but He is in the business of helping us refocus on sinful nature towards a righteous purpose.

e. Transition

- i. There are two parts to the cycle of disobedience though. If we were left as the unfaithful generation, then it would not be a cycle but a downward trending line. The second part of the cycle brings us hope, and this hope is the judges.

VI. The Cycle of Disobedience Requires Two Things: Rise of Judges

a. [Read Judges 2:16-18]

b. Notice the function of the judges

- i. Judges come and are used by God to save the people of Israel. God raises people even amid disobedience and suffering to help save His people. We must always remember God doesn't gain delight from our misery; He always provides a path out. Sometimes the way is time, sometimes the road is hard work, and sometimes the path is merely surrendering.

- ii. Also, notice God raises the judges. These judges do not rise out of their strength. We often find little background for the judge who has arisen other than the Lord's calling of them toward His purpose.
 - c. The people's response to the judges
 - i. We see the people of Israel turn away from God's chosen leader, and they fall right back into their sinful patterns.
 - ii. There are a variety of words used to describe this sharp turning from the Lord.
 - 1. ESV-whored after other gods
 - 2. NIV-prostituted themselves to other gods
 - 3. NJKV-played the harlot with other gods
 - 4. These harsh phrases give us insight into the depth of the problem Israel was facing.
 - iii. They forgot the way of their fathers and the commandments of the Lord. After spending so much time chasing after false ways, they lost sight of God's way.
 - iv. When we become fixated on the wrong things, it becomes difficult to keep the right things in our path.
 - d. God moved to pity
 - i. It's important to remember God's stance and reasoning behind all of this. God doesn't give up on His people because He continues to send judges. He sees their oppression and chooses to send relief for them.
 - ii. He doesn't keep us entirely out of the consequences of our sinful cycle. We must ask the question, does God have the power to prevent us from suffering the consequences of our sin? Yes. Would God be just if He always did? No.
 - iii. We must remember God doesn't enjoy our suffering. The Israelites choose to seek other gods over and over again, yet God still didn't turn away from. Scripture says He is moved to pity because of our affliction.
 - iv. We have a God who loves us unconditionally, and He places judges in our life to reconcile us to Himself.

VII. Cycle Formed

- a. [Read Judges 2:19-23]
- b. Optional Illustration: Deer in pool Gif

If you have access to screens, it's worth putting up the image of a gif where a deer runs back into the water after being rescued. The back story of this gif is a family who stumbles across a baby deer in their family pool. The deer is swimming, and the father goes in the water to help the deer out of the pool.

The deer resists the father for a long time but is eventually carried out. Here's the catch, as soon as it gets outside of the water it runs right back into the middle of the pool. This helpless deer is stuck in the water, and yet we laugh because it instantly jumps right back in after being rescued. Is this not what the Israelites are doing in this passage? The better question, is this not what we do in our own lives? Are we resisting the Father when He tries to help, only seeking to launch ourselves back into the pools of our sin?
- c. Judge dies, cycle starts

- i. Verse 19 says, “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. They did not drop any of their practices or stubborn ways.”
 - ii. Notice the four things which happen after the judge dies:
 - 1. Turned back
 - 2. Going after other gods
 - 3. Serving and bowing down
 - 4. Don't drop their practices
 - iii. The people of God are so fixated on their sin and getting back to it; they miss a heavenly encounter with God. We know God is with the judges, and yet as soon as the judge is gone, struggle returns.
 - iv. I believe it's important to note the four things which happen because they are all highlighted by the last one. They don't drop any of their sinful practices. How does the cycle begin? We don't make any lasting changes! When the Israelites encounter God, they make temporary fixes, but then they return to their destructive patterns.
 - v. It's as if the people of God are only as healthy as their ability to stay in proximity to God's chosen leaders. Can you imagine what a world would look like today if we only practiced our faith when we were around God's chosen leaders, like pastors? It might seem like a world who was active on Sunday and Wednesday, yet kept their sinful practices every other day of the week.
 - vi. What reaction does this bring for God?
- d. The anger of the lord is dealt
- i. God decides to give Israel what it is due, which is punishment. He makes an active decision to reward them for their choices with what they have earned.
 - ii. Defiant decisions deserve destruction.
 - iii. God uses this opportunity to not clear out the rest of the people groups within the Promised Land. The land promised them stays a little fuller; all due to the Israelites' decisions.
 - iv. God uses the remaining nations to serve as a test for Israel. Will they walk in His statutes, or will they choose to remain in their destructive ways?

VIII. Conclusion

- a. The cycle is here today
 - i. This isn't a cycle simply located in ancient Israel. This is a cycle that plagues and destroys Christian communities today. It may not look like nations overthrowing us, and it may not look like God raising one individual to save a nation. But it's happening.
 - ii. This isn't about comparison, because we've all been at different places on the track. Whether you find yourself in the middle of sinful behavior or on the backside of a close encounter with God, we all can struggle with the cycle. What's beautiful about this realization is knowing we can make it stop.
 - iii. This process is no less a race than riding a merry-go-round, and we can all get off at the same time. It takes intentionality in looking for God over our sins. The devil wants us to look around at all the other people who are stuck going around and around in their sin, telling us how we don't have to get off just yet.
- b. The first step to stopping

- i. The biggest lie we can believe is that God doesn't want us due to our sin. We know from Scripture, even those caught in the cycle of sin bring God toward pity. He isn't standing off in the distance judging us; He's standing near us ready to relieve us from sin.
- ii. We need to become aware of how God is moving and active in our lives. He made the nation of Israel aware of His presence through the judges, and we are going to look at three specific judges to see more tools we have for breaking the cycle.
- iii. We need to ask ourselves, do we believe God is active and moving? If we think yes, then where is He working? How can we join Him? If we assume no, then what do we believe is standing in the way of His work? Is something standing in the way of us seeing His work?
- iv. God has a great job He wants to do through us, but He's going to need our entire lives to accomplish it. Let us agree to break the cycle to hand Him our lives, not just a season.