

Almost every Friday night when I was younger we would go down to the local tavern restaurant for supper. This wasn't fine dining by any stretch of the imagination. It was good food and there was plenty of it for not a lot of money. What I remember most was waiting for my dad and mom to get home from work. Waiting for my dad to finish paying the bills. Going with my parents to the bank. Driving next door to pick up my Grandma and then driving to the restaurant. It was what we did on Fridays. It was our pattern.

That was a good pattern, something worth repeating for the memories and the time it gave my family together. Other patterns aren't so good. That's the kind of pattern in the first lesson. During this period, known as the time of the judges, God's people weren't following what God wanted. Judges weren't the ones sitting in black robes on a bench in a courtroom. They were more like rulers, deliverers. They were needed because the people were going their own way, following their own pattern.

Unfortunately the pattern of the time of the judges is a pattern repeating itself in human beings. When things go alright, when there's no pressure, when bad things aren't happening, that's when we're most tempted to fall into this pattern...

**It's the pattern of sinners
We foolishly fall away
We foolishly are delivered by God**

Read the book of Judges all the way through sometime. This time in Israel's history is marked by the theme verse of the book of Judges, **"In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit."** Quickly a pattern becomes evident. By chapter ten, already the pattern has repeated four times.

It always began the same. **"Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD. They served the Baals and the Ashtoreths."** Again meant this wasn't the first time the Israelites did evil. This was particular evil that they got comfortable with. They started interacting with surrounding nations and bringing in those nations' gods. These were of course false gods, idols, statues of wood and metal made by human beings with absolutely no power or ability. The Israelites ended up with so many gods they had no room for the true God. **"And because the Israelites forsook the LORD and no longer served him, he became angry with them."**

God refused to be mocked. These were his people, but if they wanted to go after these false gods, then so be it. The second step of the pattern involved the Israelites falling away from him. In response God sent other nations to rise up and oppress his people. God sent the two nations, one from each side. These pressed the Israelites in the middle, crunching them for eighteen years. God gave them this time of suffering and burden. It had an effect. The Israelites came to their senses. Just like the young man in the parable Jesus told in the gospel, the Israelites realized the gods they were worshiping were less than worthless in helping them fight against their oppressors. With nowhere else to turn, the Israelites turned back to the LORD.

The third step in the pattern, the LORD heard their cry. His grace listened when there was no reasonable expectation he would. Even after his people turned away from him when they cried out to him God answered. That was God's grace. The LORD does take them on a memory tour, highlighting moments they may have forgotten. Times he delivered them and they didn't stick with him. Remember, this was part of a bad pattern. Israel had blessings but turned away from God over and over. Surprisingly, it sounded like God had enough. **"Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen. Let them save you when you are in trouble."**

How familiar that pattern sounds? When a couple of weeks go by and attendance is up I think maybe long term success is just around the corner. I get comfortable standing in front of a group growing in size. When first time guests show up and we get the chance to show them how much we care it feels good. I experience times of blessings. But like the pattern I easily turn away. I look at myself, reasons in me for success. I've let the thought creep in that God was finally taking notice of us. We've been down, we deserve a little time going up. Success has been my idol. What's your idol? It happens. Praise, validation, being recognized might be your idol. Easy times, good health, a good relationship. But it's a pattern, good times can turn bad. Oppression arrives. It might be health, wealth, or family that suffers. It might be things seem harder, progress more difficult, or you hurt more. Idols, false gods, are what you beg to get back because you feel you can't live without them. You didn't deserve them being taken away. But times of success won't help me. Former comfort can't help you. And the oppression, God's behind it. Yes God allows it to happen. All with a purpose.

God listened to them and answered them. The Israelites responded by confessing their sins. **"We have sinned. Do with us whatever you think best, but please rescue us now. Then they got rid of the foreign gods among them and served the LORD."** They openly admitted their sins, admitted the blame was theirs. No blaming God, no blaming other nations, no blaming anything else. It was them, their sin, and their rejection of God. They got rid of the false gods and the idols. They were serious about putting themselves completely in God's gracious hands.

That was the last step of the pattern. God brought them right where he wanted them to be, repenting and getting rid of these idols. But this part of the pattern wasn't because of the Israelites. It was God. In you it is no different. In the moments of oppression, with no comfort, that's where God brings you and me. Brings us to see it's no one's fault but ours. God has no reason to listen to us. No real reason to receive our worship, praise, or offerings. We say what those Israelites said, **"We have sinned against you, forsaking our God."** And when God brings our thoughts back to him, we see only grace. God's great promises and gracious hands. Grace, great mercy, and love. Then it sweeps over us. God loves us and promised to deliver us. God brought what he did into our lives for good purposes. The bad, the oppression, the recognition of sin is all for a good purpose. It shows the love of the LORD. It all brought us back to the LORD, putting us into his gracious hands.

It's foolish to walk out on a baseball game in the bottom of the ninth tied at two with your favorite team up to bat. It's foolish to leave the symphony in the middle of the last song before the big finish. It's foolish to fall away from the God who has done such wonderful and amazing things for you. But it's the pattern of sinners. We're fools, but we're not the only ones. God is a little foolish too. We are foolishly delivered by God.

The sheer number of times in the book of Judges that God delivers his people seems foolish. Once we can understand. Twice, maybe because he's generous. But by the fourth time we're thinking it's foolish. Yet he's the God of free and faithful love. The LORD responded in love. His rescue was love. He delivered them when they cried to him for help. That was love. He loved when there was no guarantee they wouldn't leave him again. They say the definition of foolish is doing the same thing over again and expecting a different result. God has his own pattern that might appear foolish, but it's better. His is a pattern of unconditional love and forgiveness. It's a pattern of faithfulness even when his people aren't faithful.

How many times could you and I fall into sin before God should be called foolish for sending his son Jesus to forgive us those sins? How much patience is too much? Some might say we've passed the limit. God might even say that. **"You cried to me for help, did I not save you from their hands?"** God's been patient, but still we feel the hammer of justice. He's allowed oppression into our lives, just as much as we need. He's pushed us and primed us for repentance. He's made us hurt until we realized we needed him. His love was just the right amount in just the right ways. The LORD is the father in the parable of Jesus, waiting and watching for as long as it takes for his children to return to their senses. That's what fathers do.

Even the first sin of the first day of our lives was too much. It separated us from him. When we didn't realize it, it was still sin. When we diminished sin so we didn't feel as bad or made excuses for it that was already too much. Thankfully God is foolish, gracious, and provides deliverance. God is foolish as he pours out forgiveness. Foolish because it makes no sense, and still he does it. Foolish because he never stops. His love doesn't stop. Christ would not stop until he completed everything on the cross. Suffered foolish amounts of pain. Conquered death and hell. Then foolishly gave it away to us freely. We're saved. We're free. We're forgiven in Christ.

God rebuilds and refashions us into new people. New people with Christ living in us by faith who can foolishly live for God. We can give thanks for God's forgiveness. We can thank him for his pattern of faithfulness. We're new people who thank him for seeking us when we weren't seeking him. We thank him that he wouldn't let us remain lost but called us to be holy and grow day by day. You are a new person living to serve God, respond to God's love, and realize deliverance is to be treasured.

It's a pattern. Some are good, some are bad. The Israelites were in a bad pattern. They foolishly fell away frequently. The LORD has what looks like a foolish pattern too. It's love and it seems foolish. But it is amazing, amazing grace. His grace calls you to repent. His grace comes after you to save you. It all seems foolish, but it saves you. It's his pattern in Christ, the pattern of God's deliverance.