

The Empty Bench inspired by Judges 2:6-15



The old community center had been the heart of Cedar Ridge for years. It was where families gathered, students learned, and neighbors helped one another. At the entrance stood a wooden bench with a brass plaque honoring Mr. Jordan, a beloved mentor who had spent decades teaching young people about integrity, faith, and service.

When Mr. Jordan retired, the town celebrated him with applause, speeches, and promises.

"We'll never forget what you've taught us," Raymond said during the ceremony.

"We'll carry it forward, and I will play my guitar in your honor," Flint agreed.

April smiled. "The next generation will know your example because I will sing songs to our Lord and Savior in your memory."

Mr. Jordan nodded. "I hope so, but remembering isn't something you say once; It's something you do every day."

For a while, everyone did.

The youth programs thrived... volunteers arrived early... the center was filled with laughter and purpose.

Years passed.

New residents moved into town, many people who knew Mr. Jordan personally relocated or passed away. Gradually, his influence became little more than a name on a plaque.

One Saturday morning, Raymond walked into the center and noticed the changes.

The mentoring room was locked.

The tutoring program had ended.

The community garden behind the building was overgrown with weeds.



"How did this happen?" Raymond muttered.

He found Cille sorting papers at a desk.

"Cille, do you remember when this place was packed with volunteers?"

Cille sighed, "I do, but people got busy and new interests came along."

"Didn't anyone think about what we were building?"

"They thought about it," she replied. "They just stopped living it."

Later that day, Raymond met Flint at a local coffee shop.

Flint glanced up from his guitar. "Hey, Raymond. What's up?"

"I went by the center. It doesn't feel like the same place."

Flint shrugged.

"Things change."

"Maybe," Raymond replied, "but we abandoned something important."

Flint leaned back. "We've got new projects, new trends, new priorities; People move on."

Raymond shook his head.

"There's a difference between moving forward and forgetting who taught us how to walk."

Flint had no answer.

The following week, April invited Raymond and Pearl to attend a town planning meeting.

The room buzzed with excitement about a new entertainment complex.

Everyone seemed eager to invest money and time into the project.

When the discussion opened for comments, Raymond stood.

"I'm not against new ideas," he began. "But before we spend our energy chasing what's next, shouldn't we ask what happened to what mattered before?"

A silence settled across the room.

Pearl nodded thoughtfully.

"What do you mean?" someone asked.

Raymond pointed toward the window where the old community center could be seen across the street.

"We've neglected the very place that helped build our community."

Several people exchanged uncomfortable glances.

April added, "He's right. We keep talking about creating a better future while ignoring the foundations that helped us get here."

One man spoke up.

"Isn't that center outdated?"

Pearl answered gently.

"Values never become outdated! Service never becomes outdated! Mentorship never becomes outdated!"

The room grew quiet again.

Still, most people dismissed the concern.

Over the next few months, interest in the center continued to fade. The town became increasingly focused on personal success, entertainment, and convenience.

Raymond watched with a heavy heart.

One evening, he sat alone on Mr. Jordan's bench.

The brass plaque was tarnished.

Dust covered the wood.

As he stared at it, he remembered something Mr. Jordan often said:

"When people forget the lessons that built them, they start making choices that eventually break them."

At first, the consequences were subtle.

Neighborhood disputes increased.

Young people lacked mentors.

Volunteer programs disappeared.

People became more isolated.

Then larger problems followed.

Community events were canceled because no one wanted to help.

Local projects failed due to lack of cooperation.

Trust between neighbors began to fade.

One afternoon, Raymond met Pearl outside the center.

"It feels like we're watching the town lose something precious," he said.

Pearl nodded sadly.

"We forgot the source of our strength."

"Is there any hope?"

"There is always hope," she replied. "But people have to recognize what they've abandoned."

Determined to act, Raymond gathered Cille, Flint, April, and Pearl.

They met inside the dusty center.

Raymond looked around the room.

"This place once changed lives. We can complain about what's happening, or we can start rebuilding."

Flint lowered his eyes.

"I haven't helped in years."

"None of us can change yesterday," Raymond said. "But we can choose today."

Cille smiled.

"Then let's start."

April grabbed a broom.

"I'll clean the meeting rooms."

Pearl began organizing volunteer lists.

Flint rolled up his sleeves.

"I'll restore the garden."

Week by week, others joined them.

The center slowly came back to life.



Children returned for tutoring.

Families volunteered.

Neighbors worked together again.

One evening, the group gathered around the restored bench.

The plaque now shone brightly.

Flint ran his hand across the polished wood.

"I finally understand something."

"What?" Raymond asked.

Flint smiled.

"It's not enough to honor the people who taught us. We have to honor their lessons by living them."

Raymond nodded.

"Exactly."

As the sun set over Cedar Ridge, the community center buzzed with activity once more.

The town had learned a lesson similar to the one found in Judges 2:6-15: when one generation forgets the values, faith, and guidance that shaped them, trouble follows. But when people humble themselves, remember what is true, and return to those foundations, restoration can begin.

And standing beside the old bench, Raymond knew that remembrance was not about looking backward. It was about carrying forward the truth that gives the future its strength.