

Judges 13-16

Judges: Missing Life For All The Wrong Reasons *How To Be A Weak Strong Man*

Every year, for the past 33 years, there's a contest held to determine who's the World's Strongest Man. Events include such tasks as pulling an airplane, carrying anvils and anchors, and completing a 100 foot course with 2 refrigerators weighing a total of 900 pounds on their shoulders. Neil and I were thinking of entering this year but our wives talked us out of it.

There's a total of 14 events in the strong man competition. But there's another kind of strength that can't be measured by airplane pulls and car dead lifts. It's the strength that everyone of us should have. It's strength of character.

Today we're continuing our exploration of the book of Judges. We're calling this series "Missing Life For All The Wrong Reasons" because we're seeing one example after another of people who were sidetracked by something less than the best for their lives.

Today we want to look at the life of probably the most famous strong man who ever lived. His name was Samson.

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What we want to do today is look at an overview of Samson's life. We're going to see that Samson was an amazingly strong individual. Physically he was a powerful man, but spiritually he was anemic.

How can we be strong in spiritual strength? As we look at the life of Samson today I want you to take note of his strengths and his weaknesses. I want you to look for his priorities and characteristics of his personality. I believe we're going to see some things that were either lacking or misdirected.

Why would God choose to include such negative things about one of His judges?

I believe the answer is in the New Testament book of I Corinthians. *Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.* (I Corinthians 10:11)

All these things, the good, the bad, and the ugly, were written as examples to us. God wants us to learn from the examples of His people.

NIV says, *These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us.*

One more thing before we look at the life of Samson. You might not get this from just reading about his life in Judges, but Samson was a believer in God.

The New Testament book of Hebrews has a chapter we call the great faith chapter. After listing great heroes of the faith like Noah, Abraham, and Moses, there's this verse

... And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah. (Hebrews 11:32)

So if nothing else, we know that Samson was a believer. To me that makes the warning of his life all the more ominous. As we review his life let's ask ourselves, "In what ways am I like Samson?"

I. Like Samson, We All Have A Task To Do

Read 13:1

This is the reoccurring theme of the book of Judges. Over time God's people begin to set God aside and go after the lifestyle of the culture around them. Eventually God allows the very culture they lusted after to gain control over them. In this case God uses the surrounding Philistines to dominate Israel.

Romans 6:16 gives us the principle. *Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?*

Whatever we yield ourselves too eventually dominates us.

But God had a bigger plan for Israel than they realized and so He brought a judge to deliver them. That judge's name was Samson.

Read 13:2-5, 24

For a Jewish woman who hadn't been able to have children this was the ultimate Mother's Day!

Not only did she have a child but this was a child with a mission. When he grew up he would deliver Israel from the Philistine invaders.

Now you might say, ‘There’s no question Samson had a task laid out for him from birth. He didn’t have to wonder what God’s will was for his life.’

“That’s not me. I’m really struggling to know what God wants from me. At this point I have no idea what God’s will is for my life.”

Actually we should all know. God spells out His will for us in the Bible. So what is God’s will?

It’s interesting that God never promises to reveal every little detail of our lives to us. Some people wouldn’t make a move without examining their feelings, checking out circumstances and looking for some immediate guidance.

The Bible doesn’t tell us to do all that. It doesn’t contain any formulas for finding out God’s will on every one of life’s decisions. Instead God’s will is found on the pages of the Bible.

Now occasionally there are some very exceptional circumstances in which we need specific direction from God, but those are few and far between. Understanding what the will of the Lord is doesn’t mean that.

There are 5 things that are specifically said to be God’s will for us. God’s will is that we be:

1. Believers II Peter 3:9 *The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.*

God is calling everyone to forgiveness through faith in His Son.

2. Spirit-filled Eph. 5:17,18 *Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.*

3. Holy I Thessalonians 4:3 *For this is the will of God, your sanctification.*

4. Submissive I Peter 2:13 *To government, home, church - authority. Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men-- as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.*

5. Thankful - I Thessalonians 5:18 *In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

If we are a believer, living a Holy Spirit controlled life in holiness and submission, being thankful to God in everything we'll be in God's will.

It's amazing how all those other details seem to take care of themselves when we're serious about living out God's clear commands.

Samson had clear direction from God. He had a task, a God given job to do. What we're going to see is, he didn't seem to take his job seriously. How seriously do you take God?

I. Like Samson, We All Have A Task To Do

II. Like Samson We All Need God's Guidance

Read 14:1, 2

This is the first of a whole series of decisions Samson makes without asking God for guidance.

The Bible says, *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.* (Proverbs 3:5,6)

This is also the first indication that Samson is living life totally based on feelings. The Philistines are the sworn enemy of Israel. God had commanded His people not to intermarry with the people of the pagan nations.

In verse 3 mom and dad ask, "What? Aren't there any nice Jewish girls to marry?" But Samson wasn't asking God what to do. He wasn't using God's clear commands as his guide for life. He saw what he wanted and guess what? Mom and dad didn't have the courage to say "no" to their only child.

So Samson marries a Philistine woman. Needless to say the marriage didn't last long.

Samson had killed a young lion. The carcass was on the road and eventually bees made a hive in the carcass.

Samson found the bees, took their honey and at his wedding reception asked his brides friends a riddle. By the way, the word translated "feast" in Hebrew is from the verb *shathah* which means "to drink."

Samson who was a Nazarite and wasn't supposed to touch wine. He's he having a drinking bash.

Read 14:12-16

Samson's wife cries continually until he finally tells her the answer which she then tells the guys who threatened her.

When they give Samson the answer it's obvious where they got it. So an enraged Samson goes out and kills 30 Philistines, takes their clothes (which means he had to touch dead bodies (another thing Nazarites weren't allowed to do) and gives the clothes to the 30 guys at his wedding party.

Brian Bill writes, His feelings of romance are now replaced with rage and revenge. Samson leaves his bride standing at the altar and chapter 14 ends with her father (who is understandably embarrassed) giving her in marriage to the best man. This sounds like something you'd see on the Jerry Springer show!

In the end, Samson never calls on God for guidance. In the 4 chapters that detail Samson's life there are only 2 recorded prayers.

The first is in 15:18. **Read 15:18**

That's a real prayer of humility and dependence on God! That's the prayer of a man who's like Israel in the wilderness complaining to God instead of humbly depending on God.

The other prayer is in 16:28 **Read 16:28**

Samson finally acknowledges his dependence on God. He finally realizes he needs God but it takes being enslaved and having his eyes poked out to bring him to that point!

Here's the question for us. What are we doing about life's choices? How are you making decisions? How do you decide a marriage partner, about job choices, about church involvement, about how you spend your money?

Are you looking for God's guidance through the principles of the Bible or are you pulling a Samson?

Samson only looked to God when he thought he needed Him. His philosophy was, “I’ll run my own life my way. I’ll make all my own decisions based on what I feel like doing.”

Remember, this was a guy with clear direction from God for his life. God was empowering him. But Samson totally disregarded God and did his own thing.

I. Like Samson, We All Have A Task To Do

II. Like Samson, We All Need God’s Guidance

III. Like Samson, We All Have God-Given Moral Boundaries

Read 16:1

How did a man whose very birth was a miracle from God end up with a harlot? Aren’t all of our births miracles from God? Don’t we all owe our very existence to God?

If you have a “don’t care” attitude about God’s purposes for your life, if you don’t think you need the wisdom of God to make decisions, if you just run on feelings, you can get yourself in places you really don’t want to be.

God hasn’t left morality up to guesswork on our part.

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24) That’s one man, one woman.

You shall not commit adultery. (Exodus 20:14) That one’s not real hard to understand. It doesn’t take a Bible scholar to interpret that one for us.

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness. (Galatians 5:19) The works of the flesh are the opposite of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. By the way, the word translated “fornication” is the Greek noun *porneia*. It’s a very general word for all types of immorality. It’s also the basis for our word pornography.

Those are God’s standards. They’re not debatable. They’re not for everyone else but us. They’re God’s immutable moral truths that are designed to set us free from guilt, pain, shame, and all the things that go along with an immoral life style.

Samson was devoted to God from the womb. He had a special relationship with God. But he still followed his passions and fell into the trap of immorality.

- I. Like Samson, We All Have A Task To Do*
- II. Like Samson, We All Need God's Guidance*
- III. Like Samson, We All Have God-Given Moral Boundaries*
- IV. Like Samson, We All Are To Make God Our Top Priority*

The Bible says, *Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth.* (Psalm 96:9)

Exalt the LORD our God, And worship at His footstool-- He is holy. (Psalm 99:5)

Exalt the LORD our God, And worship at His holy hill; For the LORD our God is holy. (Psalm 99:9)

Glory in His holy name; Let the hearts of those rejoice who seek the LORD! (Psalm 105:3)

Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (I Corinthians 10:31)

God calls us to make our lives about the greatest thing and the greatest thing is God. We're here for Him. He's supposed to be our top priority.

Read 16:4

Samson's relationship with Delilah is legendary. Mention Samson to most people and what comes to mind is Samson and Delilah.

First there was the woman of Timhah. Next it was the harlot from Gaza. Now it's Delilah from the Valley of Sorek. Are you seeing a pattern here? He doesn't rule over his passions. His passions rule over him. These were all Philistine women. Samson wanted what ever he saw that appealed to him.

Samson may be real strong physically but he's a total wimp when it comes to his own desires. We've passed over some of his great feats of strength like killing 1000 Philistines with the jaw bone of a donkey or ripping out the gates of a city to humiliate the people there.

He was strong. But he was a weak strong man. Our culture has a really skewed perspective on what makes a real man. Think about how many movies portray a real man as someone who is hard drinking, hard loving, and hard living. He gets what he wants. He's strong.

Here's God's perspective on strength. Anybody can let their passions run them. Any weak person can just give into whatever sin appeals to them at the moment. It takes a strong man to live out God's truth. It takes a man who is totally controlled by the Holy Spirit.

You want to see a real man, look at Jesus Christ. It took unbelievable strength to live like He did.

Well, Samson isn't spiritually or morally strong so here he goes again. He decides he loves Delilah and the rest is history.

Read 16:5, 6

Was Delilah God's choice for Samson? Did Samson bother trying to find out? What would his life have been like if he would have married a godly Israelite woman?

Read 16:7-15

What do you think about Delilah when you read that passage? Do you think she loved Samson? Do you think she wanted what's best for her man? We already know what she loved. Eleven hundred pieces of silver, that's what she loved.

Now I read this and I think, "Dude, how stupid can you be? How can you not get it Samson? How can you not see that Delilah's just out for herself and that she's willing to sell you out to get what she wants?"

Here's what happens when we do life our way instead of God's way. Insensitivity towards God destroys our natural reasoning powers.

The Partnership For A Drug Free America has a web site called the Faces of Meth. You're presented with a series of faces of people before they started using meth and then after. The pictures are absolutely striking.

Here's a few examples...

Now you'd think that just looking at those would cause people to say, "I'm staying away from that stuff."

But National Association of Counties surveyed 500 county law enforcement agencies in 45 states. When asked what's your number one drug problem, what do you think they said? Sin blinds us to rationality. It eventually distorts our ability to form judgments by the process of logic.

We don't get ourselves into trouble because we're thinking clearly.

Read 16:16-20

Here's the question. Do you think the strength was really in his hair like his hair was magic or something? What was his hair a sign of? It was a sign of his special relationship with God.

When Samson told Delilah the source of his strength it was like his final time thumbing his nose at God. This was it. It was like his ultimate repudiation of the God who had worked in his life since before he was even born.

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II. Like Samson, We All Need God's Guidance

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IV. Like Samson, We All Are To Make God Our Top Priority

V. Like Samson, God Continues To Work With Us Till The Very End

Read 16:21

Four things happened to Samson. First they gouged out his eyes. Samson took what he saw and now he's blind.

Next, they took him down to Gaza. That's where he ripped out the city gates showing how tough he was..

Gaza was the most important Philistine city. Now he's humiliated.

Then he was bound with bronze shackles. The man who went where he wanted and did whatever he wanted was in chains.

Finally, they set him to grinding in the prison, which was the work of slaves and animals.

Here's Israel's deliverer, God's special man, totally humiliated.

Read 16:23-24

Dagon was the chief Philistine god. Dagon was half man and half fish. The name "Dagon" is derived from *dag*, which means "fish." All Hebrew words are built off 3 letter vowel stems. Interestingly the word *dag* comes from the verb *dagah* which means "to multiply."

Like most ancient gods from the region, Dagon represented fertility and the vivifying powers

of nature and reproduction.

I don't know how all this strikes you, but when I first read about Samson I wonder why God allowed all this to happen? It definitely doesn't make God and His people look good. Why would God work through a man like Samson?

Remember, *These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us.*

God's character never changes. The Bible promises, *The eternal God is your refuge.* (Deuteronomy 33:27). He's, *the same yesterday, today, and forever.* (Hebrews 13:8)

God doesn't cut corners with truth or morality. God is called "the holy One," 44 times in the Bible. But as we've seen over and over in Judges God has a plan and a purpose that He's working that's way bigger than anyone ever imagined.

And God amazingly used His people to make sure that plan was accomplished. His people were faltering, sinful, and at times absolutely rebellious. But in the end God worked through them to complete the ultimate task, to bring His Son into the world.

God kept on working in and through Samson right up until the end.

Read 16:25-30

Samson's prayer in verse 28 implies some things. It implies...

1. That he finally has faith in God.
2. He still has hope in God's mercy, even though he's sinned.
3. He finally prays to accomplish his mission and acknowledges that without God he's powerless.

Where did all his rebellion and self-will get Samson?

Grinding grain for his enemies, humiliated, and blinded, and ultimately dieing with the Philistines.

God didn't give up working through Samson but He had to bring him to the end of his rope before he finally realized his own vulnerability. It took all of that to bring Samson to the point where he'd depend on God.

God doesn't give up on us but I pray that He wouldn't have to bring us to the end of our rope

before we see His wisdom.

Before we can understand we have a task to do.

Before we can understand we need God's guidance.

Before we can understand we have God-given moral boundaries for life.

Before we can understand we are to make God our top priority.