

## Judges 16

### Strength & Weakness: *Walking Away From God*

A couple of weeks ago I had a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Groupon had a deal where you could drive a Lamborghini Gallardo on the road-racing track at Summit Point in West Virginia. Sandy bought me my Father's Day present, Birthday present, Christmas present, all rolled into one.

For those of you who may not be up on your Lamborghini statistics, a Gallardo has a 540 horse power V-10 midmount. It's a 2 seater so you have the V-10 sitting right behind your head. Top speed is 200 but I was limited by the Summit Point straightaways so I could only get up to 90 before I had to let off to make the next curves. But I did get to 90 in 6 seconds.

Unlike the ride home in my mini-van, there was nothing slow, tedious, or boring about the Lamborghini. It was loud, ostentatious, conspicuous, and pretentious.

And you know, if all of life was like driving a Lamborghini, nothing would catch us by surprise. Everything would be obvious and out front. We'd know we were moving down the road, and so would everybody else, including the AA County police!

But most of the time life happens in a much slower, much more subtle way. And that's why too many times we find ourselves in a place we really don't want to be. And sometimes we're not even sure how we got there. We don't go 0 to 90 in 6 seconds. It all happens gradually, step by step.

How could a person who knows God, how could a person who's experienced the peace and joy of living for God, walk away from God?

This is week 3 of a 4-week series we're calling "Strength & Weakness." What we're doing in this series is taking an in-depth look at the life of the man Samson in the Old Testament book of Judges.

In some ways Samson is unique. He's loud, ostentatious, conspicuous, and pretentious.

But in other ways Samson is very ordinary. He's ordinary, because like us, he's easily led astray. He's easily sidetracked. And so today we want to see how Samson got off track so we can put up guardrails in our own lives to keep us pointed in the right direction.

## Let's begin in Judges chapter 15 page 252

### *I. Idolatry Gives The Illusion Of Self-Sufficiency*

Samson was a young Israelite who lived around 1150 BC.

It was a hard time for God's chosen people and they continually slipped away from following the One who had led them out of the slavery of Egypt and brought them into the Promised Land.

They were surrounded by idolatry and they often became overwhelmed by it.

Now you might be thinking, "Wow, those people were so superstitious and ignorant. I mean, how simpleminded do you have to be to worship some god made of a piece of wood?"

But see, while idolatry can be worshipping gods made of wood or stone, at the same time the Bible is full of warnings about idolatry that have nothing to do with statues and images.

For instance, listen to this warning: *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.* (Colossians 3:5)

In his book on addictions titled *A Banquet in the Grave*, Ed Welch gives a good scriptural overview of idolatry and then he writes, "Scripture permits us to broaden the definition of idolatry so that it includes anything on which we set our affections and indulge as an excessive and sinful attachment. Therefore, the idols we can see-such as a bottle-are certainly not the whole problem."

"Idolatry includes anything we worship; the lust for pleasure, respect, love, power, control, or freedom from pain. Furthermore, the problem is not outside of us, located in a liquor store or on the internet; the problem is within us. Alcohol and drugs are essentially satisfiers of deeper idols. The problem is not the idolatrous substance; it is the false worship of the heart."

Israel's problem wasn't those wood and stone images. It was that they didn't want anyone, or anything, ruling over them. They believed they could control those idols. They couldn't control Jehovah God, but they could control their idols. Or so they thought.

But eventually the idol (whatever it is) takes control of the worshipper. Whether it's passion, pride, sex, drugs, food, money, power; idolaters want their idol because they believe it serves them. It gives them a sense of self-worth. It makes them feel good, important, or whatever.

Samson was commissioned by God Himself to begin to deliver Israel from the Philistine invaders. God had used the Philistines to oppress the Jews because the Jews chose to worship idols rather than to worship God.

They thought the idols would give them what they wanted (like rain, abundant crops, and fertile wives). God demanded holiness. The idols didn't make demands. The idols just gave and didn't take.

But then God brought judgment. God only wanted good for His people and worshipping false gods instead of worshipping the true and living God wasn't good at all.

Israel suffered under the Philistines for 40 years. But when the people repented, God sent Samson to run the invaders out of town.

Here's the irony of idols. They give the illusion of independence. It was the Philistine gods that the Israelites were drawn to. Idolatry is so deceptive that the people actually thought they could worship the gods of their enemies and still maintain their independence.

Isn't that what we think? Don't we want to be in control?

Martha Peace writes, "If we are not content to wait on God for our desires, if we are miserable and sin as a result, then our heart's desire is not set on the glory of God. Instead, our desire has become an idol."

The 16<sup>th</sup> century reformer John Calvin wrote, "From this we may gather that man's nature, so to speak, is a perpetual factory of idols."

In another place he said, "...every one of us is, even from his mother's womb, expert in inventing idols."

So here is Samson, who God's instrument for leading God's people. God announced Samson's life purpose before Samson was even born. He was to be a man of God who would do God's work.

**Read verse 20**

Here we find Samson doing God's work for 20 years. That's a good track record.

The book of Judges gets its name from the leaders that God raises up at various times during the 300 years that the book covers in Israel's history.

These are not guys in black robes sitting on the bench deciding court cases. These are more like leaders who rally the people to fight against their oppressors.

Samson was one of those Judges for 2 decades. His feats were so awesome the Philistines were driven back into their strongholds and didn't trouble Israel all the days of Samson.

*I. Idolatry Gives The Illusion Of Self-Sufficiency*

*II. Self-Sufficiency Clouds Spiritual Vision*

*And he judged Israel twenty years in the days of the Philistines.*

Now... Now what?

Now... **Chapter 16 verse 1 (read)**

The Bible warns in no uncertain terms... *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.* (I Corinthians 10:12)

Samson had some rough beginning years. We saw that in the first messages in this series. He was proud, he was arrogant, he was led by emotion and self-focus. But God had His hand on Samson's life and so there's apparently years in which he at least kept his self-will under control. But there's a character trait that apparently Samson could never shake. It's one we all deal with daily. It's the illusion of self-sufficiency.

God was all over Samson's life from day one. He's one of only three people in the Bible who God says, "Here's My plan for you before from your even born."

He had a miraculous birth. He gets a whole chapter (Judges 13) dedicated to the events surrounding his birth. It's even announced by The Angel of the Lord.

The Angel of the Lord, the **יהוה מלאך**, in Hebrew, was a specific designation for God as He appeared to people. And since the Bible explains that *No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.* (John 1:18) most biblical scholars think the Angel of the Lord is the Son of God before His incarnation.

Samson had his birth announced by Jesus Christ Himself!

We're told that the Holy Spirit repeatedly came upon Samson. He was one of a select few that was chosen to be Judge.

But self-sufficiency always clouds spiritual vision. Samson gets 4 whole chapters in God's eternal word. That's a lot of real estate in the Bible. But there's only one recorded time in those 4 chapters that he calls God his Lord.

That comes at the end of his life in a tragic situation. We'll get to that next week.

If I'm self-sufficient instead of God-sufficient, if I'm counting on me and my judgment instead of all that God has done and is doing in my life, eventually everything collapses like a house of cards.

My life crumbles because I see things my way and I'm blind to God's way. I may know about His way, I may be aware of His way, I may memorize Bible verses, I could be a judge in Israel. I could be pastor of Faith Community Church, but here's what happens...

For whatever reason Samson, who has had as continual problem with the opposite sex, goes down to Gaza.

We know the name Gaza from the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. That's the same Gaza. It has a 5000 year history.

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century BC Gaza was captured by the Philistines from the Egyptians and made a center for the worship of their chief deity, Dagon. It's where Samson is going to lose his life.

At this point Samson travels 25 miles down to the heart of Philistine territory. He was successfully ruling in Israel and keeping the Philistines at bay. He must have thought he was pretty hot stuff.

That's what happens when we attribute our success to ourselves and ignore God.

So what does this great judge of Israel do? He goes in to a harlot. And that doesn't mean he went in for a visit.

Samson's mid-life crisis ought to stand as a warning to all of us. The inclination to sin

never dies of old age and our weaknesses never go away. Samson never really dealt with the problems that plagued him at the beginning.

How tragic. I don't know why he went to Gaza. I don't know if he went just because he thought he was so bad and wanted to flaunt it. I don't know if the harlot was in the plans from the beginning. We're not told.

But what I do know is this. With every step of that 25 mile journey Samson had an opportunity to turn back. One man estimated that 25 miles is 56,250 steps. With every step he had the opportunity to recognize, "This is really a bad idea." With every step Samson had the opportunity to ask himself, "What would God want me to do?"

Isn't that us walking through life? We know that the Bible clearly lays out the truth that we're all rebels by nature.

We can see it from the first chapters of scripture all the way through the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the new. We're rebels by nature and by choice.

Sometimes we show that rebellion in very obvious ways; lying, adultery, drunkenness, porn, uncontrolled anger. Those are all evident and observable by everyone around us.

But a lot of times we rebel in less apparent ways. We harbor bitterness, we let our pride get control, we judge others, or we let our self-righteousness keep us from a relationship with God. Those are a lot harder for the people in our lives to perceive. If we're careful we can hide those sins from people.

But the *one* we can't hide from is God. The Bible says, *For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.* (1 Samuel 16:7)

The Bible makes it clear that *sin is transgression of the law* (1 John 3:4) and that *all unrighteousness is sin* (1 John 5:17) then it declares, *There is none righteous, no, not one.* (Romans 3:10)

It's our self-sufficiency, our self-trust that keeps us from seeing ourselves as we really are. That's why God speaks so clearly in the Bible. He just pulls aside the curtains of self-delusion and shows us the truth. *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* (Romans 3:23) From the Bible we clearly see we need a savior.

The second truth we see from the Bible is that God is the savior. The Old Testament prophets and the New Testament writers come together to confirm that Jesus Christ is the savior.

I Corinthians 15 sums up the Good News: *For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.* (I Corinthians 15:3,4)

Samson didn't know the details of Jesus but he did know that God was savior.

And just like he took those steps as a believer in God, so can we. We can have faith. We can be believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. But at the same time, if we're allowing self-sufficiency to cloud our spiritual vision we can take steps away from Him.

So look what happens next... **Read verse 2**

The Philistines hear their archenemy Samson is in town. This is their chance.

**Read verse 3**

This wasn't a hollow-core luan door from Home Depot. The gate of the city and the doorposts were solid. If an enemy attacked the gate would be closed to keep them out. The gate was heavily fortified.

It's been estimated that the gate and the posts would weigh about 700 pounds.

This was like something out of the annual World's Strongest Man Contest.

Why did Samson bother? What was he doing? He was humiliating the Philistines. He was rubbing it in. He robbed Gaza of it's main source of defense.

For Samson to take the city gate and to put it on his shoulders and to carry it away was his way of saying, "See, not only can you not catch me, I'm going to destroy the symbol of your security." He carried the doors and put them on top of the hill, which faces Hebron in the land of Judah. That was where the people of God were. He put them up there as if to say, "I can do anything I want."

*I. Idolatry Gives The Illusion Of Self-Sufficiency*

*II. Self-Sufficiency Clouds Spiritual Vision*

*III. Clouded Spiritual Vision Keeps Us From Seeing God's Purposes*

## Read verse 4

Finally we get to Delilah. Her name is synonymous with the story of Sampson. When I say “Samson” you think “Delilah.”

Samson was really starting to slide south now. Sin has a way of multiplying exponentially in our lives. His small steps from God were turning into a 100 yard dash to destruction. His Lamborghini was rolling.

His problems of lust and revenge never really went away. And now, he’s feeling arrogant and invincible. This is a recipe for disaster. He’s enraged the Philistines by ripping off their city gate and he’s inflamed his old passion for lust.

Idolatry, putting anything in the place of God, gives us the illusion of self-sufficiency. We think, “I can live parts of my life without God.”

Self-sufficiency clouds our spiritual vision until we make self-willed, foolish decisions. We don’t say, “I think I’ll ruin my marriage and sleep with a woman who’s not my wife.” It’s more like, “I know it’s not the best idea but I’ll just keep developing this friendship with my secretary.”

No one says, “My goal in life is bankruptcy.” Instead it, “I know it’s a stretch but I want that bigger house. I know we can’t afford it but I’m tired of my 10-year-old car. I want one of those new Beamers.”

Then foolish decisions and clouded spiritual vision keeps us from seeing what God really has for us.

Samson could have been a shining star in Israel’s history. God chose him to be His servant. If Samson simply had yielded his life to God’s will, we’d be reading about a life of faith that we’d all hold up as an example to emulate.

We’d tell all the little kids in Sunday School, “Here’s Samson. Here’s the details of his faithfulness. You can be a Samson for God.” Instead we skip over Samson in kids’ Sunday School. We don’t want them to know at a young age some of the stuff he pulled. Today we hold him up as a negative example who lived as shameful life.

How’d you like God to put 94 verses in the Bible basically telling everybody from every generation the details of your moral failures? I wouldn’t.



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.

He was strong. But he was a weak strong man. He was an incredibly strong man with a dangerously weak will.

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. He was the perfect man's man. 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 verses 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 verses 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?"

But isn't that the point? We trust ourselves, we lose spiritual vision, and we forget God's purposes. We don't get ourselves into trouble because we're thinking clearly.

## Read verses 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. Remember, he was a Nazirite from birth. That was God's designation.

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.

Here's the sorry end of the Delilah saga... **Read verse 21**

Just like us, this is not at all where Samson planned on ending up.

They gouged out his eyes. His wandering eyes had caused his heart to wander and now he's blind. They took him down to Gaza. That's where he visited the prostitute. It isn't where he thought he wanted to be.

He was bound with bronze shackles. Sin promises freedom but it delivers confinement. They set him to grinding in the prison, which was the work of slaves and animals. Sin's way always looks like the easy way, but eventually its yoke is hard and its burden is heavy.

Brian Bill writes this, "If we don't recognize and deal with our fatal flaws, we'll end up just like Samson blinding, binding, and grinding. Blinding will take place as we lose our moral compass and vision. Binding will result as we lose our freedom and liberty. And we'll spend the rest of our lives grinding out a purposeless existence."

So then what can we do to make sure our life ends differently than Samson's? Let me give you some take-home points.

*1. Recognize your spiritual soft spot.* What area of your life has the most potential to ruin you? Is it lust? Coveting? Revenge? An unforgiving spirit? Anger? Lying? Psalm 38:18 says, *For I will declare my iniquity; I will be in anguish over my sin.*

*2. Confess your need for help.* Until you admit you're vulnerable, you'll never experience victory. Psalm 34:17, *The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; He delivers them from all their troubles.*

*3. Steer clear of temptation.* Don't put yourself in situations where you know you're vulnerable. The British playwright Oscar Wilde famously said, "I can resist everything except temptation."

We may feel that way, but the biblical truth is different. For a Christian the command is, *Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.* (Mark 14:38)

4. *Ask for help.* Ask for God's help which He so willingly wants to give. Second, ask for the help of others. When you look at Samson's life, everything he did, he did by himself. He never mustered the troops. He never partnered with anyone. Find a trusted friend and open up. Ask someone to hold you accountable.

5. *Incorporate God's truth into your life.* That's why we're here this morning. Read God's Word and put it into practice. It's just a short walk to becoming a Samson. Cultivate your relationship with Christ. Maybe you need to be baptized. Maybe you need to hook up with a Bible Study class on Sunday mornings. We're going to have a summer study for 6 weeks that we'll be letting you know more about.

6. *Get busy serving.* Samson served himself. If he would have been serving God, his life would have been drastically different. Help out in children's ministry. Serve as an usher. Help cut the grass. Go to the prison or the rescue mission. Run a camera or train to do sound. Find a spot and serve.

Finally, I want us to look at one more verse. It's actually an amazing verse when you think about it.

## **Read verse 22**

What's that about? What was the outward symbol of Samson's inward devotion to God? It was his hair. What did he just get cut? He just got his haircut. So, what is he now? Publicly he's shamed, he's standing before everyone. His lack of hair says, "I have disobeyed God!"

But God in His mercy put a verse in Scripture that captures His love and His grace. Even though Samson had outwardly disobeyed, God said, "That which is a sign of My strength will grow again!"

God is a God of second chances!