

Re-Cycling Judges, Samson: “Uncontested”
Text: Judges 13-16 (selected)
9-2-18



Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context... (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

“Have you ever felt like if the Bible were being written today, your life story would actually be included as some glaring counter-point to all that God intended for humanity? Can you imagine a group of unsuspecting children being exposed to all of your dysfunctionality, via the “flannel-graph”?”

“Share with the group about the visitation of the angelic messenger at the birth of your child (if appropriate)? Okay, I’m assuming that didn’t happen, but can you share about the hopes and dreams you had concerning your child, at their birth?” (if applicable)

“Do you notice any similarities in the birth narratives of Jesus and Samson? Do you believe that to be offered with some intentionality? What do you suppose we are to take from such comparison?”

“Why do you think it’s important to be as aware of our strengths as our weaknesses?”

“Where is the stirring that is creating discomfort in you? Where is there a confession? What one decision--- what one demonstration--- might interrupt the cycle and free you to live responsibly?”

“With whom are you involved in healthy relationship and is that relationship making room for loving correction? Who hurts you? Who wounds you?”

“Where do you suspect that God is presently at work in your life? How might a simple, ‘Remember me, God?’, serve to signal your willingness to cooperate?”

Teaching Notes...

Samson was born in the 12th century, B.C. It was an incredibly primitive and violent era when nations fought for survival. It was a time with no central government, no monarchy, plenty of civil unrest, and “relativism”. The final verse of Judges summarizes the context this way: *“Everyone did what was right in his own eyes”*.

God’s people seemed to move in next door to the Canaanites and Philistines and adopted many of their practices and values, effectively forfeiting any capacity for exposing them to something different... something better.

As Judges opens, the people of God are challenging the occupation. In this story, not only are the Philistines ‘ruling over them’, but it is being **uncontested**.

They don’t “cry out for help”! No groaning. No misery. They are so assimilated. This is an adaptation that is so complete that resistance seems futile. Compromise is so total as to render the people of God almost undistinguishable.

Our journey has always been offered to us as a movement from bondage to liberty; from slavery to freedom. What becomes apparent is that our struggle is not always in the “breaking free”, but in “living freely.”

Freedom is always a movement out of something old and dysfunctional and strangely comfortable, to what is new and healing and risky and liberating: from fear to trust, from isolation to belonging, from brokenness to wholeness.

- Samson is born the child of promise (“the promising child”). He is actually offered as a messianic figure. He is the only other figure in the bible, besides Jesus, to be given such a birth narrative. He is, as are we, a bundle of contradictions. He is chosen but seems to keep striving for the blessing that is already his. He makes vows that he rarely keeps. He is a man of incredible strength and debilitating personal weakness. He thinks he can dabble in temptation and remain unscathed.

In the absence of time for a thorough consideration of Samson’s life, let me offer what I believe to be some things that are glaring about the story for me:

- ~ **He assumes Godly-character to be the inevitable result of chosenness.**
- ~ **He attempted to compensate for personal weakness with impressive, public expressions of strength.**
- ~ **He lived “publicly” in isolation.**

He assumes Godly-character to be the inevitable result of chosenness.

“The Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon him...” (14:6)

Samson was “entitled”. It’s in our DNA and you won’t need a saliva swab to detect it. It’s the belief that I’m exceptional; that the world owes me something; that “I’m not hurting

anyone else”; it’s not my fault. Entitlement must find a way to perform so as to include you, but not really “need” you.

The power of God **on** you or **in** is never a guarantee of character. Our history is riddled with people with whom God has collaborated to accomplish much good and bring much blessing.

In Samson, we see that strict, religious codes are no match for a disorderly heart.

He is a Nazarite. No bars. No barbershops. outward symbol of an inward reality. The abstinence was not the vow. The growing of the hair was not the vow. The ring is not the marriage. It is a present reminder of the commitment you have made and your determination to live faithfully into those promises. The signs/symbols must never be mistaken for the reality.

“You desire truth in the inner parts.” Psalm 51

In order for truth to create a reality of blessing for us, it has to go below the surface and reach to the inner parts. Faith must penetrate to the deeper places where your loves are found and where your loves are surrendered.

Law can define appropriate and safe behavior, but it cannot inspire it.

“Don’t handle. Don’t taste. Don’t touch. Such rules require strong devotion and self-denial, but they provide no help in conquering a person’s evil desires”. Colossians 2:21-23

The Law served to ‘cut-off’ every other route, almost ensuring that we would turn to God.

“For no one can be made right with God by doing what the Law commands. The Law simply shows us how sinful we are” (Romans 3:20).

It’s not simply about “curbing our appetites”, but about transforming them so that we actually desire something else... something better and better for us.

He attempted to compensate for personal weakness with impressive, public expressions of strength.

Samson is presented to us as a man whose incredible potential and capacity is rivaled only by the absence of substance in his life. For all intents and purposes, he was wildly successful and accomplished in his public life. Privately, he was a disaster.

Samson is **“duplicious”**. He is **“two-fold”**.

Samson has “blind spots” and “bald spots”.

There are things about his life that he simply cannot see. There are things about his life that he simply refuses to see.

He lived “publicly” in isolation.

What is glaringly absent from Samson’s life is healing community. No one whom he would permit to speak into his life. No one who could lovingly confront him. He was untouchable. Unavailable. Off limits.

Samson is always acting independently. He is a larger-than-life figure, accomplishing epic feats, which makes it easy not to notice how isolated he really was. The only person whom he ever allowed to get close to him was simply leveraging the relationship for their own purposes.

“Wounds from a friend are better than kisses from the enemy”. Proverbs 27:6

Only those who truly understand the outrageous nature of grace can unhesitatingly consent to their failures.

“Sovereign Lord, remember me again.” 16:28

It’s not an “all-I-have-to-do-now” approach, which remains subtly dependent upon our own renewed commitment to making life work without God. It requires both **confession** and **repentance**.

Confession provides the safe-confines in which we can honestly confront our brokenness and receive grace.

Repentance as the gift that God offers us which not only allows us to admit our brokenness, but provides the courage and capacity to pursue a better, and less destructive way of life.

Whatever God is stirring in your soul must eventually become more compelling than the comfort of your present dysfunctionality.

Here’s how he often seems to accomplish this: he must first create the frustration and dissatisfaction and then attempt to lead us toward himself for restoration.

We are looking for some redemption here. Some glimmer of hope. No one writes this ending of the story from its beginnings. Samson didn’t say, *“I want to go out guns blazin’ in a suicidal display of fearlessness.”*

No one envisions sacrificing their families, forfeiting their marriage, abusing their gifts. There’s no glory in that. Not for you. Not for God.

We find it hidden in 16:22... *“Before long, his hair began to grow back.”*

What Samson discovered, unfortunately, was not the cure for male-pattern baldness, but grace! This is the flower pushing through the asphalt; the remarkable, the unexplainable.