

Judges 16 One day Samson went to Gaza (this is in Philistine territory), where he saw a prostitute. He went in to spend the night with her. ² The people of Gaza were told, "Samson is here!" So they surrounded the place and lay in wait for him all night at the city gate. They made no move during the night, saying, "At dawn we'll kill him."

³ But Samson lay there only until the middle of the night. Then he got up and took hold of the doors of the city gate, together with the two posts, and tore them loose, bar and all. He lifted them to his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron.

⁴ Some time later, he fell in love with a woman in the Valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah. ⁵ The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, "See if you can lure him into showing you the secret of his great strength and how we can overpower him so we may tie him up and subdue him. Each one of us will give you eleven hundred shekels of silver."

⁶ So Delilah said to Samson, "Tell me the secret of your great strength and how you can be tied up and subdued."

⁷ Samson answered her, "If anyone ties me with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, I'll become as weak as any other man."

⁸ Then the rulers of the Philistines brought her seven fresh bowstrings that had not been dried, and she tied him with them. ⁹ With men hidden in the room, she called to him, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" But he snapped the bowstrings as easily as a piece of string snaps when it comes close to a flame. **So the secret of his strength was not discovered.**

¹⁰ Then Delilah said to Samson, "You have made a fool of me; you lied to me. Come now, tell me how you can be tied."

¹¹ He said, "If anyone ties me securely with new ropes that have never been used, I'll become as weak as any other man."

¹² So Delilah took new ropes and tied him with them. Then, with men hidden in the room, she called to him, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" But he snapped the ropes off his arms as if they were threads.

¹³ Delilah then said to Samson, "All this time you have been making a fool of me and lying to me. Tell me how you can be tied."

He replied, "If you weave the seven braids of my head into the fabric on the loom and tighten it with the pin, I'll become as weak as any other man." So while he was sleeping, Delilah took the seven braids of his head, wove them into the fabric ¹⁴ and tightened it with the pin.

Again she called to him, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" He awoke from his sleep and pulled up the pin and the loom, with the fabric.

¹⁵ Then she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when you won't confide in me? This is the third time you have made a fool of me and haven't told me the secret of your great strength." ¹⁶ With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was sick to death of it.

¹⁷ So he told her everything. "No razor has ever been used on my head," he said, "because I have been a Nazirite dedicated to God from my mother's womb. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man."

¹⁸ When Delilah saw that he had told her everything, she sent word to the rulers of the Philistines, "Come back once more; he has told me everything." So the rulers of the Philistines returned with the silver in their hands. ¹⁹ After putting him to sleep on her lap, she called for someone to shave off the seven braids of his hair, and so began to subdue him. And his strength left him.

²⁰ Then she called, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!"

He awoke from his sleep and thought, "I'll go out as before and shake myself free." But he did not know that the Lord had left him.

²¹ Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes and took him down to Gaza. Binding him with bronze shackles, they set him to grinding grain in the prison. ²² But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.

²³ Now the rulers of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to celebrate, saying, "Our god has delivered Samson, our enemy, into our hands."

²⁴ When the people saw him, they praised their god, saying,

"Our god has delivered our enemy
into our hands,
the one who laid waste our land
and multiplied our slain."

²⁵ While they were in high spirits, they shouted, "Bring out Samson to entertain us." So they called Samson out of the prison, and he performed for them.

When they stood him among the pillars, ²⁶ Samson said to the servant who held his hand, "Put me where I can feel the pillars that support the temple, so that I may lean against them." ²⁷ Now the temple was crowded with men and women; all the rulers of the Philistines were there, and on the roof were about three thousand men and women watching Samson perform. ²⁸ Then Samson prayed to the Lord, "Sovereign Lord, remember me. Please, God, strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes." ²⁹ Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, ³⁰ Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived.

³¹ Then his brothers and his father's whole family went down to get him. They brought him back and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. He had led Israel twenty years.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Dear People of God,

Whether we recognize it or not, we all have some kind of strength. Maybe you're quiet, gentle and thoughtful. Maybe outgoing and funny. Perhaps you're athletic or very smart. Perhaps focussed and creative. There's no end to what might be your strength. It could be that you don't even fully recognize what your strength is. For Samson it was his physical strength and maybe even good looks. You too have strengths, certain characteristics and character traits that God has given you that make you uniquely equipped for something. They aren't necessarily spiritual gifts, but they are nonetheless traits that God gave you when he knit you together in your mother's womb.

Whatever that trait is, there is very often a corresponding weakness. Sometimes people say, "Your greatest strength is also your greatest weakness." In the case of Samson, that means something like this: his physical strength along with his long-flowing hair made him attractive to women. He was Mr. tall, dark and handsome, you might say. Good looks and muscle. Those are nice. However, the flipside is that Samson had an unhealthy attraction for women. They were attracted to his good looks and muscle and he was not discerning about they kind of woman he might give his heart to.

Without a doubt, Samson has a moral weakness for women. He has a weakness that leads him to all kinds of moral and spiritual failures. In Judges 14, his desire for a Philistine wife led him to break his Nazarite vows of holiness. He disobeyed his parents' advice to seek a good Jewish wife according to God's commands and took a Philistine woman instead. And now even after losing his first wife, he falls in the same trap again. It's not an uncommon pattern.

The Danger of Our Weaknesses

So, first of all, today, we need to think about the danger of our weaknesses or weak spots.

Judges 16 begins with Samson spending the night with a prostitute in Gaza, an important Philistine seaport city. After the fiasco in chapter 15 which ended with him losing his wife, Samson sought comfort in the arms of another woman instead of the Lord. Just like before, Samson cozies up to the enemy, rather than drawing near to the Lord. He compromises himself as a Nazarite servant of God by crawling under the sheets and wrapping himself in the blankets of someone that even self-respecting Philistines would not associate with.

Then we read in v.4,

Jdg 16:4 "Some time later Samson fell in love with a woman in the Valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah."

To Samson she was Delilah the delightful! She was a Philistine from Sorek, just across the border from Samson's hometown in Israel. The text simply says that he fell in love with her.

However, Samson's view of love has more to do with infatuation or lust than anything else. He is a very modern man in that sense; not interested in how he might love his woman as Christ loves the church, but only concerned with what he can get. The muscular strong-man no doubt attracted the ladies but he always looked for the wrong kind. He looked only at the outside but not at their heart—whether they would be a good partner to help him in his walk with the Lord God. He made bad choices in that regard.

As the story unfolds, the Philistine leaders pay Delilah a very high price to deliver Samson into their hands. Whether Delilah really understood what they were intending to do to Samson, it's not clear. They only told her in v.5 that they would tie him up and subdue him. The NASB says, "bind him to afflict him." Either way, their words are intentionally vague. Perhaps she thought they would just capture him and have a stern talking. Or maybe rough him up a bit. We don't know exactly what she thought they meant but they had more sinister plans when they gouge out his eyes.

Regardless, Delilah was seduced by money. Think of it: each one of the Philistine leaders, according to v.5, offer her eleven hundred shekels of silver. Philistia was comprised of five primary cities, each with its own ruler. So it's likely that there were 5 leaders who came to Delilah. They each offered her 1100 shekels of silver which is about 28 pounds or 13 kilograms. Just to put that in perspective, in Judges 17:10 a man is offered wages of 10 shekels of silver a year plus free food and clothing to serve as a priest. According to that figure, 1100 shekels would have amounted to a year's wages for 110 years! Multiply that by the five rulers and Delilah was anticipating a whopping 5500 shekels of silver! Let's just say it's about 550 times the annual salary of someone in her country. It might be like one of us who makes \$75,000 a year being offered \$40 million. Delilah would walk away with a hefty jackpot, much more than just a nice retirement fund!

So Samson's strength—his muscle and good looks—leads him into the hands of a woman who will use him for personal gain. Delilah, if she was attracted him and falling in love with him, set that aside for money. Someone said, "The account indicates that for mental ability, self-command, and nerve, (Delilah) was a remarkable woman. Unfortunately, she put her gifts to evil use by exploiting Samson's love." (ISBE, I, p.915).

That, my friends, is what Satan always does with us. He exploits us. Perhaps finds our strength and the corresponding weakness so that he can work to destroy our lives, or at least our witness for Christ in this world. Delilah succumbed to Satan's wiles as her strength—her good looks —attracted Samson. Then Satan tempted her to use her beauty as a means to enrich herself, even if it was at Samson's expense.

We don't have to look with disdain on Delilah. Samson is no better in many ways. He's been given strength by God to defeat the Philistines but instead he's following the desires of his sinful flesh as well. And that should give us all pause. As much as we might like to think that we are all faithful servants of God, the truth is that we all have areas of moral weakness to be aware of.

Samson reminds us that integrity is very important to our Christian witness and work as servants of God. Weakness in only one area of our life can lead to our downfall.

Fred Smith is with the Lord now. But he was a good Christian man. While being a very successful businessman, he served on the boards of many different companies and ministries throughout his life. In a chapter in one of his books, he talks about the need for integrity. He writes,

After I spoke to a group of corporate officers, several of us gathered around for a bull session. One of the CEOs, with his tongue loosened by spirits in a bottle, said, "Fred, you talk a lot about self-respect. How do you define it?"

"I can't give you a dictionary definition," I said, "but I can tell you how I know I've got it. When I wake up at three o'clock in the morning, I talk to the little guy inside me who is still simple, honest, and knows right from wrong. He hasn't rationalized enough to become sophisticated. He still sees things black and white. He is the 'honest me.' When we can talk freely, I know I'm in trouble. If he says, 'Get lost, you're a phony,' I know that I've lost my self-respect.

Instantly the CEO jumped out of his chair, circled it, and said, "Man you done plowed up a snake!" Evidently his night dialogues were troubling him. A few months later, I understood his response better when I read he was under investigation.

Smith goes on to say,

Integrity is based on character. . . .

My experience has brought me to a controversial belief about character: Character is sectionalized like a grapefruit, not homogeneous like a bottle of milk. When we say a person has a strong character or a weak character, we assume that their character is of one piece of cloth. I have not found this to be true. Some totally honest in business are hypocritical in personal life. Some are trustworthy in one section of their life and untrustworthy in another. . . . Few people indeed have all good sections, and few have no good sections at all. (Leading, 19f)

The bad sections of Samson's life are obvious. His weakness in the area of lust, sex or self-control has negative effects on other parts of his life. He lacks integrity; his whole life is not moving in one direction. And that makes seeking first God's kingdom and his righteousness a difficult thing.

Yet there are a few times recorded in the Scriptures where Samson clearly has a desire to be a servant of God who works on God's agenda to deliver Israel from the oppression of the Philistines. That's, after all, what God set him apart to do! Particularly near the end of his life, then, as a blinded muscle man before the Philistine crowd of Dagon worshipers, we see that all-important integrity restorer. His weakness in one particular area of his life had done great damage. Samson has lost his sight and much more. But God is not done with him.

Overcome by Repentance

Note with me, secondly, not only the danger of Samson's moral weakness, but also how he faces it; namely by repentance. God always is prepared to hear the cry of his repentant child! We should never forget that. Samson's sorrow for his moral failures is real. In the quietness of his jail cell, Samson finally gets in touch with that voice of his faithful covenant God within him. As he faces the crowd in temple of Dagon, we read,

Jdg 16:28 Then Samson prayed to the LORD, "O Sovereign LORD, remember me.

O God, please strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes."

We might be more drawn to the references to revenge. And as we discussed in chapter 15, that's certainly a bad quality in Samson which God does not approve of. However, he still sovereignly uses Samson for his purpose. In this prayer, then, we should hear the opening words as well: "O Sovereign Lord, remember me." And when we hear Samson say those words, we do well to think about the repentant thief on the cross who said much the same thing:

Lk 23:42 "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. "

There is genuine repentance. And with Samson too.

We noted in a previous sermon that Samson is a walking contradiction. But aren't we all! There lives within us all that tension that the Apostle Paul talks about in Romans 7:

Rom 7:15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.

When one piece of the grapefruit of our character lacks integrity, the rest of our character suffers too. Only by seeking God's grace and the Holy Spirit's strength to overcome our sinful desires are we able to build a stronger character as a Christian.

God honours repentance and he grants forgiveness to us fully and freely because of Jesus. He is willing to use us when we humble ourselves before him. He delights to hear our prayer, "O Sovereign Lord, remember me! For Jesus' sake, remember me. Forgive me and use me for your glory and honour as only you can do, even though I have made a mess of my life and continue to sin!" That is a sweet prayer in the ears of our God.

We too often allow Satan to convince us that God can't or won't use us until we are perfect. Well, Samson shows us a completely different story. Yes, God calls us to strive for perfection. Our lack of it must always drive us to see how weak we are and how we fail. But also how we are so blessed to be able to turn to our gracious God in repentance. Then we can also be sure to find God's grace. As an old hymn puts it, "None who to Jesus came were ever sent away!" Grace means God loves us and picks

us up out of the dirt and wipes us off and uses us in his service again—because of Jesus! Looking at Samson helps us see how much we all need God’s grace and how God can still use us in his service, despite our ongoing failures. If we think we have to be perfect before the Lord can use us, we’ll never do anything.

Grace means we are forgiven freely through Jesus and our sin is not held against us. But it doesn’t mean that our sin does not run its natural course. If, for example, we are rude and constantly tick people off, we must repent of it, but people will still keep their distance from us, at least until we prove ourselves changed. In the same way, Samson’s sin in chasing after Philistine women and breaking his Nazarite covenant causes him to suffer the consequences of his foolishness: having his eyes plucked out and being paraded around like a trophy. We should not think that we can sin recklessly and not face the consequences in many ways.

Therefore those who are repentant must not only pray for the Lord Jesus to forgive our sins. We must also ask the Holy Spirit to build us up in the faith. We need the Holy Spirit to help us build integrity, to make our lives more and more one complete unit in service to Jesus our King. Grace is not an excuse to go on sinning; rather it is the reason we seek God’s mercy and help, knowing that his way of life is best for us and for our witness in this world.

Just think of the powerful effect Samson could have had in leading the people if he would have lived an upright life. Perhaps with his Spirit-given strength, he could have rallied the people of Israel behind himself and against the forces of the Philistines in a way that King David did years later. But God was forced to work through Samson despite his weakness instead of Samson working with the Lord.

God’s Success Despite Our Failures

That brings us to our final consideration today. The Lord can still accomplish his plan for your life through you regardless of your failures. He is gracious and faithful to the end. God uses Samson's failure as an occasion for Samson to show the Philistines the power of God. In the episode with the prostitute, Samson carries off the gates leaving the city of Gaza open to attack, a sign to the Philistines that Israel's enemy will be defeated. **Samson here prefigures Christ the Redeemer who ultimately tears open the gates of hell rendering Satan's supposed defences useless.** And later Samson brings down the temple of the Philistine god Dagon and with it over 3000 people (v.27), including all the leaders of the Philistines. Likewise, our Lord Jesus defeats Satan and all the forces of hell when he rises from the dead victorious over the enemy. Dear people, God will not share his glory with another and, despite our failures, he accomplishes his work through us. He brings down the enemy and brings about salvation for his people. He is an awesome God!! Amen??

Just think about it. What would become of Israel when even Samson her judge/deliver was faithless? What would happen when Samson shows great contempt for God by revealing his Nazarite secret to the enemy? Would God forsake his people? Will God forsake you and me because we fail him? No, God is faithful. Like we read in 2 Timothy:

2Tim 2:13 if we are faithless,

*he will remain faithful,
for he cannot disown himself.*

That must bring joy to our hearts! Thanks be to God! The Lord had determined that his people Israel must be delivered and preserved for the sake of bringing about the true Redeemer, Jesus Christ. The enemy cannot snuff out the Lord's chosen race and thwart his plan for salvation.

Samson's life exemplifies all that is wrong with Israel in his day: *Each one doing what's right in his own eyes.* **But Samson's failures are not greater than God's grace.** God remains faithful to his children and still manages to work his good purposes through a wayward child who messes up big time. Blind Samson, humiliated before the Philistines but once again humble before the Lord, is filled with the Spirit of God to push on the "central" pillars of Dagon's temple and bring the whole place crashing down. Literally and figuratively, he shows us the power of God over the forces of evil. And his life reminds us that even we—broken and sinful—can repent and be used again of God to do serve his purposes in this world. That's grace.

That's where the Lord calls us to get up and embrace his grace. Stop trying to prove yourself worthy to be used of him. None of us is. Sometimes we feel less worthy because we've fallen into sin more than we care to think about. Our tendency is to try to work hard to show everyone that we're better. But you can't work yourself into God's good books. You can only rest in his grace and live out of it. Then maybe people will see that you're changed—if the Holy Spirit helps them to see it. But as long as you have your eyes on people, you're missing the excitement and missing the grandeur of God's grace. You and I need our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of us all.

Congregation, may the grace of God in Samson's life inspire us to walk ever closer to God. May we not be content to leave areas of moral weakness to reek havoc in our lives. Just because God can hit a straight blow with a crooked stick, doesn't mean we should be content to be crooked. Rather, his grace and power ought to encourage us to seek the constant presence of the Spirit of God to resist every temptation we face. By the Spirit, may the weaker parts of our character be strengthened and our lives become a sacrifice of praise to God in every part. As he is faithful to the end, may we seek to be faithful as well. May we always rest in his grace through faith in Jesus Christ for forgiveness of our sins. And may we rest in the Spirit's power as we aim to do what honours God out of gratitude for his amazing love and grace.