



Unit .09

Session .04

The Humiliation of the Proud

Scripture



Judges 14:8-9; 16:4-5, 16-17, 21-22, 26-30

8 After some time, when he returned to marry her, he left the road to see the lion's carcass, and there was a swarm of bees with honey in the carcass. **9** He scooped some honey into his hands and ate it as he went along. When he came to his father and mother, he gave some to them and they ate it. But he did not tell them that he had scooped the honey from the lion's carcass. ... **4** Some time later, he fell in love with a woman named Delilah, who lived in the Sorek Valley. **5** The Philistine leaders went to her and said, "Persuade him to tell you where his great strength comes from, so we can overpower him, tie him up, and make him helpless. Each of us will then give you 1,100 pieces of silver." ... **16** Because she nagged him day after day and pleaded with him until she wore him out, **17** he told her the whole truth and said to her, "My hair has never been cut, because I am a Nazirite to God from birth. If I am shaved, my strength will leave me, and I will become weak and be like any other man." ... **21** The Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes.

They brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles, and he was forced to grind grain in the prison. **22** But his hair began to grow back after it had been shaved. ... **26** Samson said to the young man who was leading him by the hand, "Lead me where I can feel the pillars supporting the temple, so I can lean against them." **27** The temple was full of men and women; all the leaders of the Philistines were there, and about three thousand men and women were on the roof watching Samson entertain them. **28** He called out to the LORD: "Lord GOD, please remember me. Strengthen me, God, just once more. With one act of vengeance, let me pay back the Philistines for my two eyes." **29** Samson took hold of the two middle pillars supporting the temple and leaned against them, one on his right hand and the other on his left. **30** Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines." He pushed with all his might, and the temple fell on the leaders and all the people in it. And those he killed at his death were more than those he had killed in his life.

Intro Options

Main Point:
God works even through
the defeat of sinful leaders
to bring about His plan.

Option 1

Can you think of a more cringe-inducing show than America's Funniest Home Videos? After decades of being on air, they never seem to run out of humiliating, gut-wrenching, and hilarious videos. Some of the best montages are the embarrassing moments at weddings. Whether it's people dancing who shouldn't be, members of the bridal party passing out in the ceremony, or desperate ladies diving for the bouquet toss, there's plenty of humiliation to spread around.

- **What funny, humiliating, or embarrassing thing has happened to you?**

All of us have experienced something we wish we could have avoided. While there are some humiliating moments we couldn't have stopped, there are others we could have dodged, but for whatever reason we did not.

When our pride flares and we deviate from God's commands, we are, like the desperate bridesmaid, diving headlong into trouble. And the ramifications are far greater than having our humiliation televised to the nation. Many people like to fly by the seat of their pants, live in the moment, and chase what the heart wants. Humility will arrive one way or another, sooner or later. Know that God opposes the proud (Jas. 4:6). But, know also that He gives grace to the humble. Humiliation, under the care of God, is a gift of grace.

Option 2

If you were to put together a winning team, what kind of people would you select? Perhaps you would look for the biggest, strongest, fastest people, giving you physical advantage over your opponents. Maybe you would choose the smartest and quickest thinkers to give you a mental upper hand. But when you look through Scripture at the team God uses in the unfolding of His plan, it seems like an unlikely collection of people.

All of the characters in Scripture are sinners in need of a Savior: Abraham the doubter, Jacob the deceiver, Moses the murderer, David the adulterer, and Rahab the prostitute. We could go person by person through the entire Bible and see this pattern repeated over and over through redemptive history. God doesn't shy away from working through imperfect people.

- **Why do you think the Bible's storyline consistently highlights the flaws and failures of its heroes? Why is that significant for us to see?**

TEACHING PLAN


By the time we reach Numbers 14, God had provided the Israelites with a number of judges to rescue them from the affliction of their enemies. Each judge was a further reminder of God's grace, but each was also a signpost to His power. Many of the judges didn't look the part, and yet, God worked through them to deliver His people and draw them back to Him.

But then, when the Israelites sinned once more, God provided a judge who finally appeared to check all the boxes. Samson was strong, unnaturally so. He was confident. He was clever. Sure, he seemed to be full of himself, but many strong leaders are, right? God had given the Israelites the leader they truly needed. Or so it seemed. It wouldn't take long to realize that this man was strong on the outside, but quite weak on the inside.

Read Judges 14:8-9



One of the great tragedies in the Christian life is that we have such vast knowledge of God's will and ways available to us, and yet, it often goes neglected. At times, we would rather not search the Scriptures for God's will because we know we would be accountable to follow it then. Deep down, we prefer to go our own way. What if God's will doesn't follow our will? Instead, we choose to go our own way to find what will work for us.

That's what Samson did in Judges 14:1-3. Samson had been dedicated to God as a Nazirite. (See Num. 6:1-21 on the Nazirite vow.) He wasn't to drink wine or beer, cut his hair, or touch dead bodies. But it was more than that; he was also to have a heightened sense of God's Word and God's mission to spread His glory. Samson, though, had other plans. It didn't matter to Samson that God prohibited inter-faith marriages (Ex. 34:15-16); He wanted this Philistine woman he saw and nothing else mattered. His parents tried to discourage him from following his impulses, but they failed. "She's the right one for me" or "She is right in my eyes" was the response. For me. My eyes. Notice that Samson's impulses led him to be careless about what God wanted, but he would not be careless about what he wanted. Everyone else—his parents, this Philistine woman, and even God—took a backseat to Samson. 

▪ How should we turn to God's Word for it to speak into our decisions, both the major ones and the everyday ones?

Some time later, Samson set out to marry this woman and on the way he chose to leave the road to see the carcass of the lion he had killed (v. 8). As he drew near to it, he saw a swarm of bees and their sweet honey ripe for the taking. So that is what he did. He took and ate, and being a thoughtful son, he gave some to his parents too. The problem? Touching a dead animal defiled a person—and that included eating out of one.

We see here how Samson's impulses continued to rule his life. He saw a woman he wanted, no matter if she was a Philistine, so he reached out to take her as a wife. He saw honey he wanted, no matter if it was unclean, so he reached out to take it as a snack. Through his impulsive behavior, Samson defiled himself and his parents too.

▪ Like Samson, what are some areas of your life that you are consistently tempted to pursue your own desires and compromise in?

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God works even through
the defeat of sinful leaders
to bring about His plan.

Judges 14–15

1-15. Samson's marriage didn't go as he had likely planned. During the wedding feast, the Philistines sent thirty men presumably to keep an eye on the foreigner. Samson saw an opportunity for profit and wagered thirty changes of clothing with the men; all they had to do was solve a riddle of his encounter with the lion (14:10-14). The men were unable, of course, and so they threatened Samson's new wife so she would discover the answer. When the men provided the solution to Samson's riddle, he was enraged and killed thirty other men to make good on the debt he owed, then stormed off, leaving his new wife behind (14:18-20).

Samson returned later for his wife, only to learn that her father had thought he had abandoned her and gave her to another man (15:1-2). Filled with fury once more, Samson burned a field. The Philistines continued escalating the situation and burned Samson's wife and her father to death (15:3-6). Samson then responded by killing one thousand men with the jawbone of a donkey (15:14-15).

Judges 16

4-17. Samson found a new love interest—a woman named Delilah. It is noteworthy that the Scriptures tell us that Samson fell in love with her, but they do not tell us if the feeling was mutual. Regardless, the Philistines recognized another opportunity to defeat Samson and so they persuaded Delilah to discover the secret of Samson's strength.

Three times Delilah asked and three times Samson lied about the source of his strength, apparently merely for his enjoyment. But Delilah persisted and eventually Samson told her that the secret was in his Nazirite vow, evidenced in part by his uncut hair. There is a reason Solomon said, "Pride comes before destruction, and an arrogant spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18). Samson's pride was speaking too loudly by this time, preventing him from hearing the warning siren blaring. It appears he felt as if he was invincible; he would soon find out he was not.

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 96, DDG)

Sin as Selfishness

When we sin, we are acting out of a selfish attitude and mind-set that assumes our action will lead us to more happiness than if we were to obey God. Because sin is manifested in our tendency to be "curved inward" toward self, it is the opposite of love. Love looks outwardly to place others before oneself, operating from the mind-set that others are more important (Phil. 2:3). Where sin selfishly seeks personal gratification and happiness, love works for the joy of others in the hopes of making others happy in God.

TEACHING PLAN

By the time we get to Judges 16, Samson has continued on a downward spiral of impulsiveness. At one point he tied 300 foxes together and lit their tails on fire to burn Philistine fields (15:4-5). He killed 1,000 Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey (15:15) in one of the greatest battle stories in the entire Bible. He did these things not to honor God, but to vindicate himself. Samson's successes led him to forget his identity. He trusted in his own strength instead of God who gave it to him. Not only that, but Samson and the Philistines were on a trajectory that looked like it could not be changed.

Read Judges 16:4-5, 16-17



Here we find God's chosen deliverer with yet another woman he should be nowhere near. Maybe you want to defend poor Samson and blame mean old Delilah for deceiving him, but we see that both these characters wanted the same thing: their own glory. Delilah wanted power and wealth, which the Philistine leaders would give her if she helped them. Samson was driven by his ego and the thrill of pursuing this woman.


So Delilah and Samson played a cat-and-mouse game. Three times she asked him where his strength came from and three times he lied to her. But Samson eventually gives in.

- **When have you seen pride lead to danger for you or someone else?**
- **What are some ways people compromise their beliefs, ethics, or promises for their comfort?**

In his pride, Samson had told Delilah the source of his strength. And then he laid down to take a nap. While he slept, Samson's hair was shaved off and his strength left him. Delilah cried out that the Philistines were there and Samson jolted awake believing he would escape as he always had. The end of Judges 16:20 records the sad truth though, "he did not know that the LORD had left him." Samson was seized, maimed, and taken to be an object of entertainment at a festival where a large gathering of Philistines had assembled.

Read Judges 16:21-22, 26-30



Here, we find strength in Samson's weakness. It is through man's brokenness that God puts His own glory on display. At the end of his life, Samson cried out to God for enough strength to defeat the enemies of God's people who were present. God reached down into the brokenness of the judge who was chosen before his birth, and for the good of His people He answered Samson's prayer. He rescued His people despite their total unbelief. Samson's downfall was the result of his own disobedience, and yet God used his death to begin the deliverance of His people. 

- **It took humiliation and weakness to finally get Samson's attention. What are some circumstances God can use (or has used) to get our attention and draw us back to Him?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:

God works even through the defeat of sinful leaders to bring about His plan.

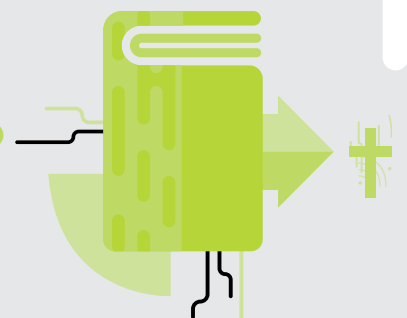
Judges 16

21-30. As Samson was nearing the finish line of his life, he remembered God's power and promises. When he had been faithful as a Nazirite, God had packed him with power. But that power was never his own; something Samson appears to have forgotten. The power was always God's power flowing through him. This moment of pain brought with it a friend: clarity. Samson understood that if God were with him, he couldn't fail. While chained to two supporting pillars, he humbled himself and asked God to give him strength to defeat his enemies. Even though it came so late, and even though it may not have been the noblest of prayers, God heard Samson's cry and answered. God gave Samson power and he used that power to defeat the enemies of God's people. God made a straight line with the crooked and wobbly stick of Samson's life, which is what He does for us too.

Jesus took our sins, and with arms stretched out on separate ends of a splintery cross, He cried out to the Father, "It is finished!" Instead of a Philistine temple crumbling down, the veil of the temple in Jerusalem ripped in half—causing the enemies of sin and death to come tumbling down. Jesus defeated our enemies for us on the cross and then rose again from the dead as the grand champion, the great victor and conqueror for God's people. His humiliating death gave us life and His humiliation of the demonic powers, our sin, and death gives us confidence to cry out to Him in the midst of anything we face in life. Through our humility and weakness we too find strength. But that strength is not of ourselves—it never is of ourselves—it is the strength of the loving, merciful God who hears us.

(p. 97, DDG) Christ Connection

Samson's downfall was the result of his own pride and disobedience, and yet God used his death to begin the deliverance of His people. Jesus' death was the result of His perfect obedience to pay for our disobedience. God used Christ's death to bring deliverance "once for all" for His people.



Our Mission

God's Story has always been designed to connect with our story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own. Suggested answers to these questions can be found on the right-hand side of the page for leaders.

Head



What are some consequences of pride we see in the life of Samson?

How does the story of Samson encourage you to use your God-given gifts for His glory and not your own?

Heart



Why shouldn't we live a "minimalist Christianity," which is essentially the mind-set that asks of us only the bare amount one can do and still be a Christian?

Like Samson's actions reflecting his heart not being in the right place, what have your actions communicated about your heart recently?

Hands



Like Samson, what successes in your life might lead you to put your trust in yourself rather than in God?

How can we maintain a strong sense of dependence on God?

Main Point: **God works even through the defeat of sinful leaders to bring about His plan.**



Head

Like Samson, we can run with a full steam of pride, only to crash and burn spiritually. Why do we neglect God's Word and then wonder why our souls feel malnourished? Pride puts us in problematic scenarios, and left unchecked, it only gets worse. Because Samson had chased his lust, despised God's commands, and ignored the pleas of his parents before this, his life was about to fall apart. The woman he loved was going to literally sell him out. He would be captured, mocked, and mauled. Samson's strength may have only been out-muscled by his pride.



Heart

While Samson had made a Nazirite vow with his mouth, the vow never made it into his heart. Perhaps as a boy he walked in the faith of his parents, but by the time he was an adult his true colors showed. Samson's flirtation with sin is a lesson for us. As Christians, we should not ask, "How far can I go?" or "How close can I get to the world without sinning?" The real question we should ask is: "How can we be holy as an expression of love for Jesus?"



Hands

We, too, allow our pride to lead us into the ditches of life. We, too, get stuck in situations and, after trying to wiggle out on our own, realize we cannot. Here we can learn from Samson. When we are stuck in our sin, instead of exhausting all the other options, and then turning to God, we need to turn to Him first. We shouldn't tinker around with other ways, ideas, and strategies. We should turn to God immediately and watch how He works. There is no need to wait until we are helplessly stuck.

It's good and right to admit our mistakes and shortcomings, but it is not enough to merely admit them. We must cry out for God's mercy as well. Admitting our missteps and spiritual miscalculations is much easier than crying out to God in complete humility, "Help me! I'm stuck. I've got nothing. You are my only hope!" This is the heart cry of someone who is depending on God. This is the place Samson finally reached. It took him some time and some pain, but God led him to where he had needed to be all along.