

Samson: Dealing With Fatal Flaws

Judges 13-16

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How many of you plan to encounter the eclipse on Monday afternoon at 1:14? It's actually quite dangerous without proper glasses. Even a brief look can cause immediate and irreversible eye damage.

This event made me think of the song called, "Total Eclipse of the Heart" by Bonnie Tyler.

*Once upon a time I was falling in love
But now I'm only falling apart
And there's nothing I can do
A total eclipse of the heart
Once upon a time there was light in my life
But now there's only love in the dark*

I wonder if she was thinking of Samson when she wrote these words because he had a total eclipse in his heart. Interestingly, his name means "sunny" but he ends up in total darkness.

We won't have time to hit all the highlights, or lowlights, of Samson's life, but we will touch on some significant details in Judges 13-16. Samson's feats are legendary but it's his flaws that prove fatal. His two greatest weaknesses were **romance** and **revenge**. In fact, his weakness for women often led him on the road to revenge. He was extremely gifted, but certainly not godly. He was strong on the outside, but had no control on the inside. He was a he-man with a she-problem because he was led by his lust, not by the Lord. He was empowered by the Spirit but enslaved by his flesh. The story of Samson reminds us that sin is deceptive and deadly.

The truth of the matter is that *there's a little bit of Samson in all of us, and a whole lot of Samson in most of us.*

In chapter 13, there's a key phrase in verse 5. Samson "...**shall begin to save Israel...**" We're going to see that he never did any delivering, because he never delivered himself. Since he didn't deal with his fatal flaws, he only "began" to deliver Israel. Notice also in verse 25 that "**the Spirit of the Lord began to stir**

him...” He was **set apart** and he was **stirred** by the Spirit of God. Samson had everything he needed to accomplish his task. He was both **energized and equipped**. And yet, he let it all slip away.

It’s important to understand that Samson was a Nazirite. Numbers 6 describes three commitments a Nazirite must keep:

- No booze (possession): He must avoid any contact with **grapes or the drinking** of wine.
- No bodies (purity): He must never touch a **dead body** of any kind.
- No buzz (power): He was to let his **hair grow** and never get it cut.

Craig Groeschel points out that Samson had three basic problems.

- Lust – *I want it*
- Entitlement – *I deserve it*
- Pride – *I can handle it*

Chapter 14 shows us seven stupid steps that Samson took. Samson was an incredibly strong man with anemic self-control.

1. He Went to The Wrong Place. Look at verse 1: “***Samson went down to Timnah.***” This is a statement about *geography*. Timnah was in Philistine territory, about four miles down a ridge from Samson’s village of Zorah. But this also tells us about the decline in Samson’s *spiritual life*. In his first public act, he leaves the land of Israel for the land of the Philistines. To put it bluntly, Samson left God’s people and headed south spiritually.

2. He Was Looking For The Wrong Thing. Listen to the rest of verse 1: “***...and at Timnah he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines.***” When he returned home, he told his parents in verse 2, “***I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines.***” After his parents try to warn him about scoping out Philistine fillys, Samson boldly declares, “***Now get her for me as my wife.***”

3. He Rejected Godly Counsel. The downward spiral continues but now takes a threatening turn when he dismisses the warning from his parents. Samson is also rejecting what God said about marrying an unbeliever. We see this in 2 Corinthians 6:14: “***Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what***

partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?"

4. He Compromised His Commitment. Samson then goes into a vineyard (which was forbidden by his vows) and encounters a young lion. The Spirit of the Lord comes upon him and he tears the lion apart with his bare hands.

5. He Continued A Wrong Relationship. Notice what verse 7 says: *"Then he went down and talked with the woman, and she was right in Samson's eyes."* Evidently he had not met her before now. But that doesn't matter because Samson is *hormone-driven, not Holy Spirit-driven*. This is the Old Testament version of *"Hello, I love you, won't you tell me your name?"* He wants what he wants when he wants it no matter what he has to do to get it.

Look at what happens in verse 9. Later on, Samson stops by the vineyard and finds that bees have built a honeycomb inside the lion carcass. He scoops out some honey and eats it, coming into contact with a dead body. According to verse 10 Samson made a feast *"for so the young men used to do."* This was like a wild bachelor bash. The Hebrew word means, "a drinking party." A Nazirite is to avoid alcohol and here Samson is throwing a kegger.

BTW, according to a new study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association Psychiatry*, during an 11-year study, alcohol use disorder (alcoholism) in America increased from 9.7% to 12.6%, which is almost a 50% increase! That means 1 out of 8 or nearly 30 million Americans now suffer from alcohol addiction. On top of that, America is in the midst of an opioid epidemic. In 2014, more than 28,000 died from an opioid overdose. If you're experimenting or addicted in any way, please attend Celebrate Recovery this Friday night at 6:30.

Sadly, Samson is a picture of a believer who is beginning to bail on his commitment. If you simply look at his long hair he appears to be dedicated to God, but his lifestyle tells another story. *On the outside he looks like a man who is committed to the Lord, but on the inside he's a man controlled by his lusts.*

6. He Ignored His Weaknesses. In verse 14 as they prepare for the wedding, Samson tells a riddle to the 30 Philistine groomsmen: *"Out of the eater came something to eat; out of the strong came something sweet."* Samson walked with a swagger and offered a wager along with the riddle. If they solved it in 7 days, he would give them some new clothes.

By the fourth day the groomsmen were getting nervous so they approached Samson's bride and made her an offer she couldn't refuse in verse 15: ***“Entice your husband to tell us what the riddle is, lest we burn you and your father's house with fire.”*** You wouldn't want these guys in your wedding party.

“Entice” means, *“to seduce a simple-minded person.”* The Philistines would say the same thing to Delilah some 20 years later. *Samson could be seduced because he was all hormones and no holiness.* Sadly, Samson's weakness was apparent to everyone but him. In the end it would prove his undoing. He eventually reveals the riddle's answer on the seventh night.

Remember this: *It's our refusal to deal with our weaknesses that most often gets us in trouble.* Craig Groeschel says it like this: *“You are only as strong as you are honest.”* Something I've heard said in Celebrate Recovery is that *we're only as sick as our secrets.*

7. He'd rather take revenge than repent. The groomsmen now know the secret of the riddle and come to Samson at the last moment with the answer. Since Samson has lost the bet, he has to find some Armani suits. In order to pay off his debt, Samson fillets 30 Philistines but he had to touch their dead bodies in order to get their clothes—another clear violation of the Nazirite vow.

Samson is angry because he has been publicly humiliated. 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 the Jerry Springer show!

When we come to chapter 15, we see that Samson decides that he wants his wife back. A few months have passed so he takes a young goat as a gift for his bride. While we might bring chocolate or flowers, *Samson gift-wraps a goat.* That's sure to win her heart. When he arrives, her father won't let him see her because she's now married to someone else. Samson is torqued and says in verse 3: ***“This time I shall be innocent in regard to the Philistines, when I do them harm.”***

Samson then caught three hundred foxes and tied them tail-to-tail in pairs and fastened a torch to them and let them loose in the fields of the Philistines.

Verse 5 says they burned up the shocks, the standing grain, the vineyards and the olive groves. The Philistines only had three cash crops – wheat, olives, and grapes. *Samson single-handedly destroys the economic base of the entire nation with the*

flaming foxes. After they torch his bride and her family, the fires of revenge are unleashed in his heart and he said to them in verse 7, ***“If this is what you do, I swear I will be avenged on you, and after that I will quit.”***

Do you see the cycle of revenge? The Philistines do something and then Samson does something. And then they respond and Samson ratchets up his response. And they retaliate again and Samson goes ballistic. Each time it gets more serious, and bloodier. Revenge always escalates the issue.

Notice that Samson doesn't mention the Lord's glory at all; he's only concerned about Himself. That's the problem with revenge – it has nothing to do with the Lord, it's all about us. Because we're hurt, we want to hurt others. Listen. You never get even when you seek revenge because you will always lose. Listen to Romans 12:17, 19: ***“Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all...Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’”***

When you try to seek revenge for wrongs done to you, you set in motion an unending cycle of violence. The only way to get off the treadmill of terror is to not seek revenge but instead to offer forgiveness.

The father of Heather Heyer, who died protesting the rally of white supremacists, made this statement after reflecting on the death of his daughter: *“People need to stop hating, and they need to forgive each other. I include myself in that in forgiving the guy who did this. I just think about what the Lord said on the cross, ‘Forgive them. They don't know what they're doing.’”*

Instead of choosing to release those who wronged him, Samon sought retaliation. Verse 8 says, ***“And he struck them hip and thigh with a great blow.”*** Later, his own people turn him over to the Philistines and then verse 15 tells us that he found ***“a fresh jawbone of a donkey . . .”*** and with it he killed one thousand men.

I'm reminded of a lady who was sick so she went to the doctor and got some really bad news: *“I'm sorry to tell you this, but I'm afraid you've contracted rabies.”* The doctor left the room for a minute and when she returned the patient was busy writing on a piece of paper. The doctor asked, *“What are you doing, writing out your will?”* She replied, *“No, I'm making a list of all the people I'm going to bite!”*

Because he was very thirsty, and was out of Gatorade, he cried out to the Lord in verse 18, ***“You have granted this great salvation by the hand of your servant, and shall I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?”*** This is the greatest prayer Samson ever prayed. He’s saying, *“Lord I know that this victory did not come by my power.”* It’s the one time where he actually acknowledged God’s presence in his life.

Samson’s great prayer comes after his greatest victory. His prayer is immediately answered and it reveals that Samson’s spirituality was present, though it was often eclipsed by his emotions. Chapter 15 concludes on a high note: ***“And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.”*** If Samson’s story ended here, it would be a tale of triumph. Samson led Israel to prosperity and peace for two decades. He thought his fatal flaws of romance and revenge were dealt with. But his lust had not boogied; it had just been buried.

Chapter 16 opens with an ominous sign: ***“Samson went to Gaza, and there he saw a prostitute, and he went in to her.”*** Twenty years of victory...and in one night he fell. Samson’s mid-life crisis reminds us that the proclivity to sin never dies of old age and our weaknesses never go away.

BTW, speaking of unspeakable sin, I attended a human trafficking conference this week at Augie and was nauseated by what I learned. Are you aware that the average age a child gets trafficked is between 11 and 14? More than 100,000 children under the age of 18 are being trafficked and there is a lot of it going on in Iowa and Illinois, much of it right here in the QCA. One trafficked individual brings in \$300,000 a year! The sex-trafficking industry is worth \$32-39 billion, which is more than Google and Starbucks combined.

Samson’s depravity is a stupid move. There’s no chance that he can just arrive and not be noticed. The Philistines hate him and had a contract out on him. And now, he’s in their capital city. He traveled about 25 miles to get there – that’s about 50,000 steps! It’s almost as if he doesn’t care if he gets caught. He’s where he should not be and he’s with someone he should not be with. And he doesn’t seem to care.

The Philistine task force surrounds the house he’s in, thinking that he’ll come out in the morning and they can capture him. But Samson got up in the middle of the night and left. On his way out of town, verse 3 tells us that he ripped out the 700-pound doors of the city gate, together with the two posts, and put them on his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron.

Samson was really starting to slide south now. His problems of lust and revenge never really went away. And now, he's feeling arrogant and invincible. This is a recipe for trouble. He has *enraged* the Philistines by ripping off their city gate and he's *inflamed* his old passion for illicit sex. He's a picture of Proverbs 25:28: "***A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.***"

Let's look briefly at four mistakes that came from Samson's destructive dalliance with Delilah.

1. He got involved with another wrong relationship. In verse 4 we read that Samson fell in love with a woman named Delilah. This is the third woman he got in trouble with and they were all Philistines.

2. He toyed with temptation. The Philistine rulers, who know all about Samson's fatal flaw, come up with a plan. Verse 5 tells us that Deliah is offered shekels of silver if she is able to "***Seduce him, and see where his great strength lies...***" In today's currency, this was an offer of about \$20 million.

Delilah agrees to trick him into revealing the secret to his strength. Samson toys with her three times, but each time he gets closer to telling her the truth. Finally he said that if the seven locks of his hair were woven into a web he would be helpless. Samson is feeling so self-confident and so cocky. He thinks he's invincible but now he's letting her touch his hair. *She doesn't know the secret yet, but he is letting her get closer and closer and closer. He's toying with temptation and playing with sin.*

Listen. You can't control your sin on your own because except for the grace of God, compromise will catch up with you and sin will control you.

3. He reveals his secret. Finally she said to him in verse 15, "***How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart is not with me?***" After playing the "*If you really loved me, you'd tell me*" card, verse 16 tells us that she resorted to a war of words: "***And when she pressed him hard with her words day after day, and urged him, his soul was vexed to death.***" Other translations use the word "*nagging*." She begged, pleaded, whined and cried day after day, all day long until he told her. This is a picture of sin – it is relentless and persuasive. That's why we must not play around with it. Proverbs 6:27-28: "***Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched?***"

The rulers of the Philistines come with the silver shekels in their hands, and she puts him to sleep on her lap. He doesn't have a clue what is about to happen.

4. He **didn't realize what he had done until it was too late.** As soon as he's sound asleep, she calls a man to hack off his hair. Verse 19 says it plainly: ***"His strength left him."*** The last phrase of verse 20 is one of the saddest statements in the whole Old Testament: ***"But he did not know that the LORD had left him."***

He didn't realize what had happened. Too many Christians drift away from God through stupidity and folly, and they don't realize what they've done until they've done it. They don't appreciate what they had until it's gone.

The Philistines have been waiting for 20 years to get their revenge. Look at verse 21: ***"And the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes and brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles. And he ground at the mill in the prison."*** The first time Samson came to Gaza it was to find pleasure and now he returns to Gaza as a prisoner!

He was forced to perform for the people as they worshipped Dagon, the fish-god. Dagon's statue was a fish at the bottom and man at the top...kind of like a mer-man. Verse 25 tells us that they brought Samson to the fish-god temple ***"to entertain"*** them. This word means to dance a jig like a circus performer. Since he was blind they likely put up obstacles and watched him run into them. They mock him and laugh at him because they believe Dagon has defeated Jehovah.

Let me say this strongly. 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. Sin blinds us, then it binds us and then it slowly grinds away at us. Sunny Samson was now living in a dark dungeon of his own depravity, eclipsed by the enemy he was supposed to conquer.

Action Steps

Let's conclude with some action steps that will help us get off the road to ruin and head down the road to recovery.

1. **Acknowledge your fatal flaws.** What's your spiritual soft spot? What area of your life has the most potential to ruin you? Is it lust? Coveting? Revenge? Alcohol? Drugs? Another addiction? An unforgiving spirit? Anger? Lying? Psalm 38:18: *"I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin."*

2. **Admit you need help.** Until you admit that you are vulnerable, you will never experience victory. Psalm 34:17: *"The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; He delivers them from all their troubles."* That's one of the reasons Celebrate Recovery is so effective. Some of you may think you no longer have a problem simply because you've swept it under the rug. Unless you admit your need for help, your flaws will just come back to haunt you again and again.

3. **Avoid temptation.** Don't put yourself in situations where you know you're vulnerable. If you have a problem with drinking, don't go to bars. If you have a wandering eye, don't flirt with anyone. Don't go to casinos if you're given to gambling. If you're tempted by honey, stay away from bee hives! Genesis 4:7: *"...Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."*

4. **Ask for help.** He who thinks he needs nothing or no one needs more than he can imagine. First of all, ask for God's assistance. Samson did this in Judges 16:28 when he prayed and said, *"O Lord GOD, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes."* God honored this request by using Samson to wipe out thousands of Philistines in his death.

Second, ask for the help of others. Sadly, when you look at Samson's life, everything he did, he did by himself. He never mustered the troops. He never partnered with a buddy. Don't make the same mistake. Find a trusted friend and open up. Ask someone to hold you accountable. If you need some specific help, find a Christian counselor.

5. **Assimilate God's truth into your life.** Gather with God's people. Grow by reading God's Word and putting it into practice. Psalm 119:11: *"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."* It's absolutely imperative that we stay connected with God and with others. Left to ourselves, it's just a short step to becoming a Samson.

We see God's grace in Judges 16:21: *"But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved."* This was symbolic of the restoration of his relationship with God. That which gives you strength will grow again.

- Restoration is possible, but it is gradual
- Forgiveness comes instantly, but restoration can take some time
- Forgiveness does not cancel out consequences of sin

Listen to how the narrative ends in verse 30: ***“Then he bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life.”***

Craig Groeschel says, *“Sampson gave his life one time. That was easy but real man give their life every day...”*

The moral of this story has nothing to do with Samson and everything to do with God. *This passage is a living lesson in the grace of God.* How a man who was beaten and blinded, humiliated by his own repeated stupidity, reached the bottom, turned around and discovered that God was waiting for him all the time. There’s nothing heroic about Samson. All he did was turn around and find God. God is the hero.

Some of us really need to hear this. Maybe you’ve gone pretty far down the road of romance or revenge and you’re grinding under a load of guilt. Listen.

Restoration of a relationship with God does not depend upon your performance. Samson came back to God *before* he pushed those pillars down. He came back to God while he was still shackled. He came back to God while he was still blind. He turned back to God and God took him. He took out 3,000 Philistines and their false god, which was his initial mission and purpose given by God. We know that because his name appears in the “Hall of Faith” in Hebrews 11. Failure does not have to be final.

Are you ready to turn back to Him...before it’s too late?

I was out running on Thursday and saw a car stopped right in the middle of 34th Avenue. The car did not have its flashers on and cars were hitting their brakes so I ran over to the woman and asked if she was OK. I wanted to see if she needed help with her car...not that I could help but I could call somebody! She told me that there was a big black bug in her car and it freaked her out. She said it looked like a bat so she just stopped right in the middle the road to get rid of the bug. She stopped to deal with it. Are you ready to stop and get rid of any of your sins right now?

Allow God to chisel away the sin that is eclipsing the Son in your life.

Video: God's Chisel

Are you going to stay in control or are you ready to surrender to the Savior and allow Him to chisel away? God loves you too much to leave you the way you are. When Jesus died as our sin payment, there was deep darkness in the land, not for a few minutes, for three full hours. It was not the moon blocking the sun but the SON paying the price as payment for every one of our sins. It was His love in the dark when He pulverized Satan's pillars of power.

Samson's life was eclipsed by his lust. Don't let sin eclipse the SON in your life.

I want to speak to men right now. This includes young men, middle-aged and older men.

One of the saddest verses in the Bible is Ezekiel 22:30: ***“And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none.”***

Many years ago a man named Henry Varley said to D.L. Moody who was working as a shoe salesman: *“The world has yet to see what God can do with and for and through and in a man who is fully and wholly consecrated to Him.”* Moody was deeply moved by these words and replied, *“I will be that man!”*

We need guys who will stand in the gap. We need men who will not just meander through life but who will live on mission. Guys who will commit to be led not by lust but by the Lord, guys who will not be controlled by revenge but by the redeemer, guys who will allow the Lord to chip away at those things that only imprison us.

Satan loves to make strong men weak and God loves to make weak men strong. Any weak men here today who want to be made strong?

In early June I spoke on Samson twice at Youth Hope's Camp Summit. I challenged teenage guys to stand if they were ready to man-up by fully surrendering to the Savior. I wasn't expecting what happened when about 30 guys stood to their feet!

If you want to be that man, would you stand right now?

New Members

8:00

Stephane Lewis
Vince Callaway
Holly Callaway