Lesson 10: Samson's Strength and Fall

Teaching Outline — God's strength is not ours to presume upon
Passage: Judges 15-16 (KJV) | **Suggested teaching time:** 45 minutes
Key verse: "And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him." (Judges 16:20b)

Lesson objective

- Class will understand:
  - God's strength is not ours to presume upon
  - His discipline and mercy are real

Timed introduction (0-5 minutes)

What people picture vs. what Judges says

- Enormous muscles, a jawbone, a collapsed building
- Judges repeatedly identifies the source of deliverance as the Lord
- Consecrated as a Nazarite before birth; treated a holy calling as if it served his appetites
- His hair was a covenant sign, not a magical battery
- The issue wasn't a haircut removing supernatural power
  - He carelessly gave away the sign of a consecration he repeatedly dishonored
  - "the LORD was departed from him" (16:20)

Handling this lesson with care

- Includes violence, sexual sin, betrayal, captivity, death
- Don't make Samson an entertaining hero
- Don't use his death as a general example that self-destruction is approved
- The narrative records:
  - God's judgment on Philistine idolatry
  - Samson's final, imperfect act against Israel's enemy
- Not permission to take one's own life
  - God alone gives and takes life

- Believers in despair need help, protection, prayer, and faithful care

Read Judges 15:14-20 and 16:4-31

- **Read aloud**
- Listen for what Samson does, what the Philistines do, and above all what the Lord does

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Context (5-9 minutes)

Where we've been

- Birth announced by the angel of the LORD (ch. 13)
  - "a Nazarite unto God from the womb"
  - "begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines" (13:5)
- Philistine oppression continues across his story
  - No settled rest like some earlier judges
- Judges 14: desire for a Philistine woman, secrecy, rage, the start of personal retaliation

Not a simple champion

- Not a man Israel wisely follows
- A man set apart to God, increasingly ruled by anger, desire, and self-confidence
- The Lord remains free and faithful to use a deeply flawed deliverer
- God's use of a person doesn't certify every desire, method, or decision

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Exposition (9-29 minutes)

Reading Samson without excusing Samson

- Deliberately uncomfortable — refuses two easy errors
  1. A comic-book strongman: enjoy the spectacle, skip the sin
  2. See the sin and conclude God couldn't be at work
- Both are true
  - The Spirit of the LORD truly comes upon him
  - God truly uses him against Israel's oppressors

    - Samson truly acts from pride, anger, lust, and revenge
- The Lord's faithfulness isn't an endorsement of Samson's character
- Helps us read all of Judges
    - The deliverers increasingly reveal Israel's disease
    - Samson brings the pattern into sharp focus
    - Appointed before birth, marked for God, empowered by God
    - The man with the greatest strength is weak in self-government
    - Tears ropes, carries gates, defeats enemies — doesn't turn from desires drawing him to ruin
- Physical power is no substitute for wisdom, purity, or fear of the Lord

1. The Lord gives strength, and Samson quickly makes the conflict personal (15:1-13)

Escalating revenge

- Comes to visit his wife; her father has given her to another man
- Burns Philistine crops with three hundred foxes, or jackals, tied tail to tail
- Philistines burn the woman and her father
- Samson retaliates: "And he smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter" (15:8)

Samson acts alone

- Doesn't gather Israel to hear God's Word, call tribes to repent, or lead a national return
- Conflicts are personal and reactive — they wrong him, he strikes; they strike back, he strikes again
- The Lord overrules the cycle for His purpose; the cycle isn't a pattern to imitate
- One can be used in a crisis and still fail to lead others toward lasting obedience

Judah's fear

- Three thousand men of Judah bind Samson and bring him to the Philistines
- Rather than joining God's judge, they negotiate with oppressors
- Samson permits it only after they promise not to attack him
- Israel has become accustomed to domination
    - They tell Samson the Philistines rule over them — as though domination is normal, resistance unreasonable
- Fear trains a people to accept what God hasn't called them to accept
- Where have we grown so used to compromise that obedience appears disruptive?

2. The Spirit of the LORD breaks the bonds (15:14-20)

The decisive explanation

- “And when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands” (15:14)
- At Lehi, “the [BLANK: Spirit of the LORD] came mightily upon” Samson
- A fresh jawbone of an ass; a thousand men
- The weapon is unimpressive; the power belongs to God

Not a hidden capacity

- The cords fail because God acts; the jawbone succeeds because God acts
- The jawbone is no military advantage — an intentional contrast
  - A weak instrument in a powerful God’s hand does what Israel couldn’t
- Not a call to seek bizarre weapons or dramatic displays
- God isn’t limited by what seems impressive to us

Song, then thirst

- “With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men” (15:16)
  - Highlights victory; doesn’t explicitly thank God
- Immediately desperately thirsty — strength can’t preserve one more hour
- “Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant: and now shall I die for thirst” (15:18)
  - Not polished, but acknowledges the deliverance came from God
- God clave “an hollow place that was in the jaw” and gave water
- After victory, Samson learned he was still completely [BLANK: dependent] on God
  - A mercy to Samson, a lesson to Israel
  - Strengthened for a public task; dependent on God for ordinary life

Receive such reminders as mercies

- Success builds a false story: preparation, intelligence, energy, personality explain everything
- Need interrupts that story
  - Weariness, limits, unanswered competence, having to ask for help
- These needn’t mean God abandoned us
  - They expose that we’re creatures living by His provision

- Humility isn't denying a gift; it's refusing to take the Giver's place

A sobering summary

- "And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years" (15:20)
- The Philistines are still in the land
- Real deliverance; an unfinished, troubled Israel

3. Presumption near Gaza (16:1-3)

Desire and danger meet

- Goes to Gaza, visits "an harlot" (16:1)
- The narrator doesn't excuse this as strategic
- Gaza: a Philistine stronghold
- Gazites plan to kill him at dawn
- At midnight he tears up the gate, posts, and bars and carries them away
- Great ability is not the same as [BLANK: holiness]
- Extraordinary ability can coexist with grave disobedience

Escape is not repentance

- A warning to every gifted person
  - Usefulness, endurance, success, or escaped consequences can be mistaken for approval
- God may restrain consequences, provide a way out, or preserve someone despite folly
  - None of those mercies makes the choices wise
- We reason backward: nothing collapsed, so God must approve
  - Judges won't allow it
  - His strength continues while his inner life moves toward disaster
- God's patience isn't a license to continue in sin

Gift and character

- Churches are impressed by ability to speak, organize, give, lead, endure, attract attention
- These may be genuine gifts
- A gift answers: "What can this person do?"
- Character asks: "Whom is this person becoming?"
- Scripture requires truth and integrity
- A gifted person needs ordinary means of grace, honest friendship, correction, and boundaries

- Public usefulness never makes private obedience optional

4. Delilah exposes a divided heart (16:4-22)

Three times

- Samson loves Delilah in the valley of Sorek
- The lords of the Philistines offer her money
- Three times she asks; three false answers; three arranged captures; three escapes
- He sees the trap and remains — desire has made him foolish
- Not deceived because the danger was hidden
    - Three times he wakes to Philistines waiting; enough evidence to leave

How sin works

- The first step appears small; then patterns form
- We protect what's harming us because we want its comfort, attention, pleasure, or control
- Warning signs become familiar; familiar danger feels safer than costly change

Repentance must be concrete

- Confessing to God, but not stopping at regret
- Sexual temptation: end a relationship, change a route or device habit, invite accountability, seek pastoral and professional help
- Anger: confess specific harm, step away from escalating conversations, speak truth without retaliation
- The principle: don't remain where you repeatedly prove you can't stand alone
- Fleeing temptation isn't cowardice; it's wisdom

The secret told (16:16-17)

- Pressed "daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death"
- "There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb"
- The hair: visible sign of the Nazarite calling (Num 6), not an amulet
- Samson says, "I shall become weak, and be like any other man"

The deeper tragedy (16:20)

- "I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him"

- Samson did not know that the LORD had [BLANK: departed] from him
- He presumed on past experience
  - Expected yesterday's mercy to guarantee today's strength
  - Refused to reckon with his covenant calling

Blind and grinding (16:21)

- The Philistines seize him, put out his eyes, bind him with fetters of brass, make him grind in prison
- The one who followed his own eyes is now blind
- A moral irony — but not every sufferer is a symbol of a particular sin
  - Don't diagnose every hardship as simple punishment
- Sin is never as private or controllable as it promises
  - Damages judgment, relationships, witness, freedom
- The Philistines use him for amusement
- Sin's promise of mastery ends in slavery

The hair begins to grow (16:22)

- "Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven."
- Not a spell returning
- The growing hair signals God's sovereign [BLANK: mercy], not a magical power source
- Prevents despair from having the last word
- Directs attention to the Lord, who hasn't surrendered His purpose to failure or Philistine boasting
- Not cheap grace
  - Terrible consequences; not reversed
  - Mercy doesn't always erase sin's earthly damage
  - Consequences aren't abandonment
- God can meet a repentant sinner in the wreckage and use a humbled life

5. A final prayer and a sober deliverance (16:23-31)

Dagon's feast

- "Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand" (16:23)
- Blasphemous — Samson's defeat doesn't establish Dagon's power
- Larger than Samson's private tragedy
  - Worship directed at a false conclusion
  - Praising Dagon for what belongs to the Lord's righteous purposes

- God won't let Dagon have the final word
- The temple's destruction: judgment on idolatrous pride and deliverance from oppression

Samson's prayer

- The boy places his hands on the pillars
- "O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes" (16:28)
- Real, but mixed with personal vengeance — Scripture doesn't hide that
- Both encouraging and sobering
    - He finally asks God to remember and strengthen — the right direction
    - His words focus on vengeance for his eyes
- We may bring conflicted hearts honestly, asking God to correct what's crooked
- Don't baptize resentment because it appears in a prayer
- The Lord alone judges perfectly
    - Seek justice without taking God's place as final avenger

The end

- God grants strength; Samson pushes the pillars; the house falls; he dies with the Philistines
- "So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life" (16:30)
- Family buries him between Zorah and Eshtaol
- Not celebration of an invincible man
    - The burial of a broken judge whose strength always belonged to the Lord

Not a model for self-inflicted death

- A judge in a unique redemptive-historical conflict
- Inside a building devoted to a false god
- A final act of judgment against Israel's oppressors
- The text describes; it gives no general command or moral approval of self-destruction
- His death is tragic; his motives aren't presented as pure
- When someone is tempted toward self-harm, don't romanticize Samson
    - Seek immediate safety
    - Call for help
    - Stay with the person
    - Point them toward the care God provides

> **Pastoral care note:** Teach Samson's death with unusual care. The passage is not a template for someone who feels trapped, ashamed, or hopeless.
>
> - If someone speaks about wanting to die, asks about self-harm, has a plan, or appears in immediate danger, take it seriously
> - Stay with the person when possible
> - Involve trusted family or church leaders who can help protect them
> - Contact local emergency services or a crisis resource when there is immediate risk
> - Seek qualified mental-health care
> - Do not promise secrecy when safety is at stake
> - The hope of the gospel includes practical protection, truthful presence, and help from the people God provides

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Application (29-35 minutes)

1. **Do not confuse a sign with the God who gives it**
    - Samson's hair mattered because it marked a consecration; the Lord was the source of strength
    - Samson's hair marked his Nazarite [BLANK: consecration] to God (16:17)
    - We can trust a routine, role, ministry position, experience, or spiritual vocabulary instead of living in humble dependence on Christ
2. **Do not presume on God's patience**
    - Samson kept returning to danger, expecting to escape "as at other times"
    - Sin promises control while narrowing our freedom
    - Repentance isn't testing how close we can stay to temptation
    - It brings sin into the light and takes concrete steps away
3. **Accept both discipline and mercy**
    - Imprisonment was grievous discipline, not proof God ceased to rule
    - His final prayer was answered not because he earned a second chance
        - God remains merciful and faithful to His purpose
    - Discipline isn't pleasant; God uses it to expose dependence and call us back
4. **Acknowledge that spiritual gifts do not replace character**
    - Capable, persuasive, energetic, visibly fruitful — still needing repentance, accountability, obedience
    - Measure life by God's Word, not by spectacle

Daily discipleship: dependence is not passive

- Pray for strength, then use the means He gives
  - Scripture
  - Prayer
  - Gathered worship
  - Trusted believers
  - Wise counsel
  - Honest confession
  - Practical boundaries
- None earns God’s favor
- Ordinary ways He trains us to live as dependent children, not isolated heroes
- Asking for help before temptation becomes a crisis isn’t weakness
  - It’s the wisdom Samson repeatedly refused

Christ and the gospel (35-39 minutes)

Samson in Hebrews 11

- “And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae.” (Heb 11:32)
- Grace, not a declaration that every part of his life is exemplary
- These people “out of weakness were made strong” (Heb 11:34)
- God’s saving purpose doesn’t rest on flawless servants
- Samson is named in Hebrews 11, showing God’s [BLANK: grace] toward flawed believers

A limited contrast with Christ

Samson	Jesus Christ
Consecrated from birth; repeatedly violated the spirit of his calling	Holy and without sin
Final act mixed God's judgment with his own desire for revenge	"when he was reviled, reviled not again" (1 Pet 2:23)
Died with his enemies	Willingly gave Himself for His enemies, and rose again

- Don't flatten the stories into a one-to-one comparison; don't strain comparisons
- Samson is a flawed deliverer pointing beyond himself
- Samson points beyond himself to Jesus, the [BLANK: true King] who never sinned

What Samson can't do

- A rescuer with real God-given power can't cure sin when he shares the problem
- Jesus:
  - Obeys the Father without divided loyalty
  - Confronts evil without becoming evil
  - Gives His life voluntarily rather than sacrificing another to preserve Himself
- His resurrection: death and shame don't have the final word
- We look not to Samson for a strength technique
  - We look through his failure to the Savior whose strength is holy, self-giving love

The gospel

- Jesus bore the judgment sinners deserve
- He rose in victory
- He calls us to repent and believe
- Our hope isn't personal strength, spiritual symbols, or a last dramatic effort
- It's the crucified and risen Christ

Discussion (39-43 minutes)

Discussion questions

1. What details in Judges 15 make clear that Samson's strength came from the Lord?
2. Why is "I will go out as at other times before" such a dangerous sentence?
3. How does calling Samson's hair a covenant sign, rather than magic, change how we read chapter 16?
4. Where are we tempted to confuse God's patience with approval?
5. How can a church respond wisely and compassionately when someone is in danger of self-harm?
6. What does Hebrews 11 teach us about grace without excusing Samson's sin?

Closing prayer (43-45 minutes)

> **Closing prayer:** "Lord God, forgive us for treating Thy gifts as though they belonged to us. Keep us from presumption, secret sin, and confidence in our own strength. Give us humility to receive Thy discipline and faith to trust Thy mercy. Guard those who are suffering or in despair, and make us people who offer truthful, compassionate help. Thank Thee for Jesus Christ, the holy and risen King in whom our hope rests. Amen."