



Parkway Fellowship

Epic Fails • Bad Haircut...Samson and Delilah • Judges 13:24-25; 16:4-30 • 11/10/2019

MAIN POINT

God sees my epic spiritual failures as events, not as who I am in Him.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Describe the worst haircut you've ever gotten.

How did you respond (i.e. cried about it, wore a baseball hat, called in sick, experimented with new hairstyles in an attempt to make it look better, embraced it, etc.)?

In this week's biblical account of epic failure, a bad haircut serves as an allusion to the reality of sin and spiritual failure in our lives. The thing is, hair grows back! The saying goes, "The difference between a good haircut and a bad haircut is two weeks." Spiritually speaking, the difference between a failure and victory in Jesus only takes a moment. Because of Jesus, God sees our epic spiritual failures as events, not as who we are.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Ask a volunteer to read Judges 13:1, 24-25.

Based on Judges 13:1, define sin.

Based on these verses, what expectations would you have had of Samson (see also v. 5)? What personal expectations do you think he might have had at the point of verse 25?

As we consider our series, "Epic Fails," why is it important for us to understand God's call, blessing, and anointing on Samson's life?

As Christians, we are blessed of God and have been given spiritual gifts and opportunities. God expects us to use our abilities and spiritual gifts for His service. The Holy Spirit lives in us and empowers us to accomplish His mission in the world. At the same time that God called, blessed, and anointed Samson by His Spirit, God knew that Samson was a sinful man just like we are. It is entirely possible to be anointed by the Spirit of God and experience an epic spiritual failure. The latter does not negate the former.

Read 1 Peter 5:8-9 and Proverbs 24:16. What do these verses teach you about believers who are called, blessed, and anointed by God?

| Ask a volunteer to read Judges 16:1-6,15-21.

How did Delilah manipulate Samson? Why might Samson have finally given in to Delilah?

Considering what we read about Samson in these verses, how can you explain that he "did not know that the Lord had left him" (v. 20)?

If you had to nail it down to one thing, what would you say was Samson's biggest problem?

Samson knew the call of God on his life, and the source of his strength. Yet he was so enslaved to his desires that he didn't even realize when the last of his Nazirite vow had been broken, causing the Lord to depart from him. Samson's pride allowed his self-indulgence to consume him, and it led to his capture by the Philistines. The hand of God that made Samson great left him and he, clearly nothing without God, became a slave.

It's easy to treat the gifts God has given us casually, taking them for granted. Observing Samson's downfall, we need to be careful, remembering that God expects us to act responsibly and not trifle with the opportunities, abilities, and spiritual gifts He gives us.

| Ask a volunteer to read Judges 16:22-30.

Did Samson need the Lord to remember him (v. 28), or did he need to remember the Lord? What are some ways we "remember the Lord" today?

What impact did physical blindness and loss of strength have on Samson's relationship with God? Can you relate this to a similar experience in your life?

Why was Samson willing to let himself be delivered over to the Philistines? How does Samson's act of deliverance point us forward to Christ (Rom. 4:24-25)?

Re-read Judges 13:5. What was Samson called to do? Who finally delivered Israel from the Philistines? Why does this point us forward to Jesus?

Samson lost his spiritual sensitivity as he repeatedly disobeyed God's commands. God can use flawed people like Samson and like us who are willing to put their faith in Him. It is never too late to turn our attention back to the Lord, believing that He hears and answers our prayers. When Samson realized his weakness and the Lord's tremendous strength, he was empowered to deliver Israel in a profound way.

In what ways has God used your spiritual failures for good in the world and in your life?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How can you know if you are taking steps away from God's plan for your life?

In what areas of life are you tempted to fail to recognize that your strength is not your own?

Judges teaches that sin occurs in cycles; at some point, you will sin again.

What is the role of Christian community to keep you from sin and to help you when you fall into it?

PRAYER

Thank the Lord for calling you, blessing, you, giving you His Spirit, and setting you apart for His service. Ask God to reveal any spiritual "blind spots" that hinder our service to God and that He would teach us to rely on His strength.

COMMENTARY

| Judges 13:24-25

In Judges 13:1-23, the prelude to the story of Samson, including the announcement of his upcoming birth, we discover that Samson was born to pious Israelite parents. The announcement follows a pattern we see elsewhere in the Bible—for example, in the birth

announcements of Samuel (see 1 Sam. 1:1-20) and John the Baptist (see Luke 1:5-25). The wife of Samson's father, Manoah, had been barren. Then the Angel of the Lord appeared to her and announced that she would give birth to a son. The Lord would give her son a special calling and empowerment.

Verse 24. All of this background information emphasizes that Samson had a very promising beginning in life. No previous judge had been similarly announced and designated as a deliverer by God even before the judge was born. No previous judge had such pious parents (contrast Gideon's father, who built an altar to Baal; see Judg. 6:25). No previous judge was dedicated under a rigorous vow to spend his entire life in consecration to the Lord.

In fact, Samson was bound by the Nazirite vow even before his birth. His mother was to avoid all fermented drink during his time in the womb (see 13:7). Furthermore, the Spirit of God gave Samson extraordinary strength (see 14:6). Although other judges won great victories, none had such physical prowess as Samson did. On top of everything else, God answered Samson's prayers (see 15:18-19). Whatever the eventual failings of the man, Samson was unique among the judges for the great gifts God had given him.

God was with Samson: The boy grew, and the Lord blessed him. The blessing of God implies that Samson did well in life. He was healthy, in good circumstances, and under God's favor. Yet the divine blessing also implies that Samson was marked for a special purpose. God didn't bless Samson just because He wanted the boy to be happy and to live an easy life. God wanted Samson to be ready and able to fulfill a calling.

Verse 25. At some point in Samson's life, the Spirit of the Lord began to direct him in the Camp of Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol. The Hebrew word translated to direct can also be rendered "to provoke" or "to disturb." The implication is that God's Spirit began to speak to Samson, and the young man became aware of God's guiding presence. Evidently, Samson (and perhaps his parents) was living at a place called Camp of Dan when this spiritual awakening took place. From all that we have read thus far in Judges 13, we might expect great things to follow. Instead, Samson chose the way of foolishness and spiritual compromise.

| Judges 16:4-5,15-17

Verses 15-17. Three times Delilah asked Samson the source of his strength, and three times he lied to her (see 16:6-14). After each lie, she actually did to Samson what he said would sap his strength. He was astonishingly foolish not to realize that if he revealed the true source of his strength, she would betray him.

Delilah wasn't about to stop trying. She nagged him day after day and pleaded with him until she wore him out. We can only assume that the combination of her nagging, his obsessing over her, and his bloated sense of being invincible made Samson utterly reckless. Not cutting his hair was the one aspect of his Nazirite vow—perhaps the only aspect—that he had kept faithfully. (See Explore More: Nazirite, below.) God continued to sustain his strength so long as Samson upheld that requirement. Samson evidently knew this to be the case. By continuing to give himself to Delilah, however, he lost the will to maintain even this minimal obedience.

| Judges 16:19-20

Verse 19. The outcome of Samson's recklessness wasn't hard to predict. She let him fall asleep on her lap and called a man to shave off the seven braids on his head. The seven braids probably included his beard as well as the hair on his head.

Verse 20. As before, once the deed was done Delilah roused Samson from sleep with a frantic warning about the Philistines. Samson calmly boasted, "I will escape as I did before and shake myself free." However, his hair and his strength were gone. The Philistines easily overpowered and bound him, blinded him, and took him off as a trophy to Gaza (see 16:21), just as he had once carried off their city gate.

We can think of Samson's "blindness" on multiple levels. First, he was blind to think that he could trust Delilah and that she really loved him. She had shown previously that she would take advantage of any weakness in him. Second, Samson was blind to think that he could escape the consequences of his foolish, sinful behavior. Third, on awakening he evidently didn't notice that his hair was gone. However, this "blindness" served only as a token for the fourth and most profound blindness: Samson did not know that the Lord had left him.

The Spirit had been with Samson in the sense that God empowered him to accomplish mighty feats in battle. Elsewhere in the Bible, the Holy Spirit empowered people for other tasks. The Spirit empowered the builder of the tabernacle to construct the facility properly (see Ex. 31:1-5). By the Holy Spirit, the prophets heard and proclaimed the words of God, and sometimes by the power of God they too could show amazing physical strength or endurance (see 1 Kings 18:12,46).

When the Spirit left Samson, the warrior lost the real source of his strength. It is perhaps significant that only in his physical weakness did Samson realize the Lord had departed. It seems that Samson's heart and soul were so far from God that, apart from his lack of strength, he never would have noticed God's absence.

Verses 28-29. At a festival in honor of their god, the Philistines decided to bring out their trophy and put Samson on display while drunken revelers watched (see 16:25-27). Shackled and humiliated, Samson nevertheless saw an opportunity for revenge. He asked his guard to be stationed between two of the temple's supporting pillars. Apparently twin pillars served as primary weight-bearing supports, perhaps at the temple entrance.

It is difficult to know what to make of Samson's end. On the one hand, he prayed to the Lord for strength, and his prayer was answered. Yet his prayer contained no hint of repentance for sinful behavior or concern for the glory of God. All he wanted was vengeance: "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."

Verse 30. Another troubling aspect of Samson's end was his request to die with the Philistines. Neither Judaism nor Christianity has ever endorsed suicide, much less using suicide to kill others. Nevertheless, Samson prayed, pushed against the pillars, and brought down the temple, giving him a peculiar epitaph: the dead he killed at his death were more than those he had killed in his life.

We cannot endorse how Samson died, but we cannot deny that his prayer was answered. As a result of the prayer, he won a victory over his enemies. While God was dishonored by Samson's sinful behavior, God nevertheless honored the calling He had given Samson, whose Nazirite status was visibly demonstrated in the new growth of his hair (see 16:22). Samson had failed to fulfill his calling, but in the end he turned to God in faith. God responded to Samson's faith (see Heb. 11:32-34).