
LOVING JESUS, LOVING PEOPLE, PLOWING A COUNTER-CULTURE

[Spring Season: April 12 – June 14 | Fall Season: September 27 – December 6]

LEADER DETAILS

- **MAIN TEXT:** Judges 14:1-20; 15:1-8, 16 (supporting text: Phil 3:18-19)
- **MAIN IDEA:** Samson's life shows that gifting without character leads to destruction, and that living by our appetites and pursuing vengeance never leads where we think it will.
- **GROWTH FOCUS:** Take some time this week to plan how your group can stay connected over Summer.
- **ICE-BREAKER:** What's one thing you're looking forward to this Summer?

ANNOUNCEMENTS (Full details at: emergence.church/digital-bulletin)

- **Totowa Updates** – The new eKids is open, we are in the temporary auditorium, and we have new service times! **Keep updated on changes here:** <https://emergence.church/totowa-updates>
- **College-ish - Mondays in Totowa @ 7:00pm - June 1 – July 6**
 - **The Why** - College-ish is a six-week session for young adults from ages 18-25 to grow, connect, and learn more about Jesus. For those who are staying local as we head towards Fall, the hope is for this to also serve as a bridge into a community group for long-term connection and discipleship.
- **Family Dedication - July 9th/12th - in both Ringwood and Totowa**
 - **The Why** - By publicly declaring their intent to raise their kids to love Jesus, parents will be encouraged to keep that commitment in the highs and lows of parenting. A great opportunity for those families to invite family/friends to hear the Gospel.

GETTING STARTED:

- **Pray:** This helps everyone prepare their heads and hearts as you turn to the discussion.
- **Watch Community Extras Video** (length 2:26 – questions from video are included below)

LAST WEEK'S GROWTH STEP FOLLOW-UP:

[Leaders: These follow-ups are meant to offer some accountability while being low-pressure. Keep it casual, "If you were able to try this last week, how did it go?" Sharing is optional; it's always okay to pass.]

- **Outward Action:** Share part of your testimony or faith story with someone this week. It doesn't need to be polished. Simply tell them something Jesus has done in your life.
- **Inward Prayer:** Spend time thanking Jesus that your salvation rests on His finished work, not your own efforts, and ask Him to deepen your trust in His grace.

SERMON DISCUSSION

Prioritize meaningful conversation over getting through every question.

What Is Right In Your Eyes?

Read Judges 14:1-10; Phil 3:18-19

Samson is set apart by God for a special purpose, yet the first major decision we see him make is driven entirely by what he wants. Despite his parents' concerns and God's clear commands, Samson insists on pursuing a Philistine woman because she is "right in his eyes." Pastor Ryan pointed out that Samson repeatedly chooses what feels right to him rather than what is right before God. Samson couldn't control his appetites. Whether it was relationships, pleasure, or food, what he wanted in the moment mattered more to him than God's calling on his life.

- How can we tell the difference between God's leading and simply our own strong desire?

[Leaders: This can be a helpful conversation about discernment. One simple grid to consider: Does this align with God's revealed will in Scripture? What do mature, godly people who know me well think? Are my motives primarily God's glory or my own? Am I willing to obey if God's answer is "no"? Together, these can help distinguish between God's leading and our own strong desire.]

- In Phil 3:18-19, Paul warns about people whose "god is their belly." What do you think that means in practical terms today?
- Where am I tempted to say "God I don't care what you say, I want that"? (question from video)

Character Matters More Than Gifting

Read Judges 14:11-20

By the end of chapter 14, Samson has accumulated a trail of destruction. Yet he remains one of the most gifted individuals in the entire book of Judges. Pastor Ryan reminded us that talent, gifting, intelligence, opportunity, and influence can never substitute for godly character.

- Have you ever seen someone's character undermine gifts that could have been used for great good?

- What habits or practices help us build character and stay connected to God rather than simply relying on our abilities?

The Trap of Vengeance

Read Judges 15:1-11; Romans 12:17-21

As chapter 15 unfolds, Samson becomes trapped in a cycle of retaliation. One offense leads to another, and each act of vengeance only creates more destruction. Pastor Ryan pointed out that people ruled by bitterness often believe they are pursuing justice when they are actually spreading devastation to everyone around them.

- What stands out to you about how quickly Samson's conflict escalates throughout these chapters?
- Is there any hurt, resentment, bitterness, or unresolved conflict that you need to surrender to God instead of continuing to carry? What do forgiveness and boundaries look like? Have you had to walk through a process like that, and what was the result? (Question from video)

Samson and Jesus

Read Judges 15:14-20; Heb 4:15-16

Samson was incredibly gifted, yet continually failed to master his desires, submit to God, or use his strength faithfully. His life points us toward our need for a better Deliverer. Where Samson repeatedly failed, Jesus perfectly obeyed. Jesus never gave in to temptation, never pursued selfish desires, and never misused His power. Instead, He used His strength to save sinners and bring reconciliation.

- What differences do you see between Samson and Jesus?
- Where do you most need Christ's forgiveness, strength, or grace right now?

GROWTH STEP THIS WEEK

- **Outward Action:** Reach out to someone you've been avoiding, frustrated with, or tempted to hold a grudge against. If appropriate, take a small step toward reconciliation.

- **Inward Prayer:** Ask God: "Show me any area where I'm doing what is right in my own eyes instead of following Your ways."
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PRAYER PROMPTS:

- Ask God to strengthen your character and devotion to Him.
 - Pray for wisdom to make decisions based on God's truth rather than personal desires.
 - Ask God to reveal any areas of compromise before they grow into larger problems.
 - Pray for freedom from bitterness, resentment, and the desire for revenge.
 - Thank Jesus for being the perfect Deliverer who succeeded where Samson failed.
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NEXT WEEK'S TEXT: See ya in September! :)