

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions are designed to help you talk about God's word and Pastor Brian's message with friends and family. You of course can use your own questions, but we'd like to give you this tool to encourage Biblical fellowship and discipleship in your circle of relationships. **Enjoy discovering more about Him!**

"THE MANY ROADS OF FATH: SAMSON- FAITH THAT RETURNS" | JUDGES 13-16 | PASTOR ANDREW PAULSEN

WARM-UP QUESTION:

- What's the longest you've let your hair grow?

"A Child of Promise" Judges 13: 2-6

Samson was born to childless parents, to be raised differently, as part of a promise that God would free His people.

- How does living different become a sign that someone's life is devoted to God?

"Give Me!" Judges 14: 1-3

Samson demands an unbelieving Philistine wife because he wanted to follow his desires and not his faith.

- What are signs that someone believes they deserve their desires?

"Far Off" Judges 16: 1-3

Samson repeatedly visits enemy territory to please his selfish desires and is far from the community of faith.

- What are the places and spaces of temptation that you see people struggle with today?

"Broken By Sin" Judges 16: 18-21

Samson is betrayed by Delilah and ends up blind and in prison because of his lust and pride.

- What twists people's views of sex in our society today?

"The Humble Return and Christ Connections" Judges 16: 28-31

Samson humbly returns to God at his death, and is buried with his family, foreshadowing that through Christ's death all can return.

- What does it mean to you that no one is too far or lost to return to God through Jesus?

REFLECTION AND APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

Samson was a historical prodigal who left his faith family and pursued selfish lust out of pride, ending up blind and in prison. Yet even there God met him and returns him home. Jesus is the true hero who defeats sin and death and returns all His people home.

- Have you been living a life devoted to God or focused on your own desires?
- What are the places and things you should avoid because it causes you to fall?
- Who are the people you need to recommit to praying and having faith God does bring people home?
- Pray that God would give you a faith that returns to Him in humility and joy.

Intro

When was the last time you read or heard about Samson? I heard there was a live action movie that came out this past year or two, his life does make for a dramatic movie.

Samson is often that comic book character of the bible, huge muscles, great hair, amazing battles. Many of us have probably not looked at his life in detail but know some of his story, and if you went to church as a kid and had an illustrated Bible, that might be your favorite part. I was talking to my sons about this message, and one said in the comic book bible he had, it seemed like the important figures were Jesus, Noah, and then Samson. He just loomed large, and he's kind of the alpha male that most boys want to become.

But he actually is more of the prodigal son in history. He's born into a good family, has all the talent in the world, and throws it away, chasing his desires. So, really, it's surprising to see he makes the list of Hebrews 11. But again, as Pastor Brian said, these people didn't make the list for their greatness, but for God's faithfulness. So just like many of us could identify with Jacob's constant grasping, we will also be able to identify with Samson's pride and lust and wandering away. And I might hit a few nerves as I talk about parenting, pride and sex. So maybe this morning you'll identify with Samson's shocking failures, maybe you identify with Samson's family watching their loved one fall. For both the prodigal and the prodigal's family, God's faithfulness is seen in the return home.

Pray

Judges 13: 2-6

There was a certain man of Zorah, of the tribe of the Danites, whose name was Manoah. And his wife was barren and had no children. And the angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, "Behold, you are barren and have not borne children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. Therefore, be careful and drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, for behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines."

A Child of Promise

Samson's birth echoes that of Isaac, born to Abraham and Sarah, a child promised to barren parents to be used by God. And this angel of the lord appears and does what every parent wishes would happen: gives special instructions on how to feed and raise this child. The mom is excited and shocked, tells her husband Manoah. Manoah prays that God would send the angel again to confirm this good news, and God goes along. The angel appears again to the woman, and she runs to Manoah and they both get to hear basically the same thing. This child is to be a Nazirite and he will free the people from their enemies.

Nazirite Vow

Now for those who don't know, the Nazirite vow was spelled out in the law of Moses. Nazirite means set apart one. They were living in a way to be totally devoted to the lord. In Numbers 6, we see the 3 main parts of their lifestyle to show they were devoted: No alcohol, no touching of a dead body, and no cutting of their hair. Overtime, this would have made them stand out: a Nazirite would have difficulty hunting. They could never complete the job of bringing in the kill, so they would have depended on others for butchering and meat. A Nazirite would have really long hair, and have to learn how to care for it in a way most men didn't. And a Nazirite would not celebrate like ordinary men with wine. So if you think about it, a Nazirite would not live the life of an alpha male, of a man's man. Yet that's who God chose to be the warrior for Israel at this time.

And for all we can tell, Manoah and his wife raised Samson as the angel of the lord called them to. They showed faith and devotion in their parenting, just like so many of you have done with your kids. Yet Samson will break their hearts.

Judges 14: 1-3

Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines. Then he came up and told his father and mother, "I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines at Timnah. Now get her for me as my wife." But his father and mother said to him, "Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes."

Give Me!

A long time ago, a husband and wife went to visit their son at college. It was a holiday weekend and they arrived that Monday morning to see how life was in the apartment and to take their son to breakfast. But he greeted them sleepy eyed and not making much sense. The mom of course was analyzing all his features, why didn't he look healthy, has he been eating enough? He said he couldn't do breakfast because he had a big test and needed to study. They asked him what was wrong, why couldn't they get food. Are you ok? And then he blurted out, it's a holiday, I partied last night with some friends, I just can't this morning. And his parents left, respecting his wishes but heartbroken to see him fall into temptation that brought shame and separation. And they vowed to pray more for their son.

And so many of you have had similar experiences. Your child got caught up in drugs, they're addicted to gambling, they ran off with some loser, they mock your faith, they've cancelled you and won't allow you to see the grandkids. They didn't just move out of your house, they've left a way of life you wished they held onto.

Manoah and his wife are in the same place. Their son is supposed to set Israel free from Philistines, not marry them. And I'm sure Samson's reasoning doesn't help: She's right in my eyes! I know what I want; my desire is my justification for my lifestyle. Samson is living out the hedonistic values of our culture today. Our culture tells us we deserve our desires, that our desires should define us. We're no longer defined by principles, not family, not traditions, not community, but what looks good to us, our lusts. The prodigal son told the father, give me my inheritance, basically saying you and your ways are dead to me, I want what I want. And that kind of lifestyle always tears apart family and hurts community, because it is selfish and fickle. Pursuing every dream and fantasy leads to broken hearts.

Judges 16: 1-3

Samson went to Gaza, and there he saw a prostitute, and he went in to her. ²The Gazites were told, "Samson has come here." And they surrounded the place and set an ambush for him all night at the gate of the city. They kept quiet all night, saying, "Let us wait till the light of the morning; then we will kill him." ³But Samson lay till midnight, and at midnight he arose and took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two posts, and pulled them up, bar and all, and put them on his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that is in front of Hebron.

Far Off

I spent my high school and college years in San Luis Obispo and Morro Bay, the beautiful central coast. There were certain spots that if told you your friends you were going there,

everyone knew you probably were hooking up, sleeping with someone. The hot springs was one that people would joke about. But every community has a make out point, a lovers lane. Schools have that corner where the potheads hang out, getting high. Amsterdam has its red light district. Las Vegas, really the whole state of Nevada for a long time represented the place for all kinds of wild activities.

In Samon's life, he keeps going to enemy territory, to the land of the Philistines. He goes to Timnah to get a wife, only to be burned and betrayed. He goes to Gaza and barely escapes capture. Later he goes to the Valley of Sorek to see Delilah who plays him for the fool. In the parable of the prodigal son, the son goes it says to a far off country for wild living. What's your far off country? Where do you go to do stuff you know deep down is against God's ways?

Some of us, it's certain restaurants or bars, some of us it is Las Vegas or foreign countries, some of us it's an electronic device in our office or in the bathroom. We all have our far off country. The culture, the environment, the surroundings are too much for any of us. In fact, secretly, that's why we go there. We believe the lie what happens there, stays there. But in the end, we get trapped, far from where God intended us to be.

And for families of prodigals, no matter how great the achievements seem to the world, they wished they'd come home for good and not visit those haunts. Can you imagine the people, running up to Manoah and his wife. Samson tore down the gate! He carried it up a hill! Isn't he amazing!? And Manoah and his wife smile, saying yeah, that's pretty amazing, but then inwardly groaning because they have a good idea of why Samson was in Gaza to begin with. They'd trade the amazing miracle for some more moral maturity. Because they know enjoying the enemy in enemy territory eventually leads to chains.

Judges 16: 18-21

18 When Delilah saw that he had told her everything, she sent word to the rulers of the Philistines, "Come back once more; he has told me everything." So the rulers of the Philistines returned with the silver in their hands. After putting him to sleep on her lap, she called for someone to shave off the seven braids of his hair, and so began to subdue him. And his strength left him. Then she called, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" He awoke from his sleep and thought, "I'll go out as before and shake myself free." But he did not know that the LORD had left him. Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes and took him down to Gaza. Binding him with bronze shackles, they set him to grinding grain in the prison.

Broken By Sin

Samson goes to enemy territory again! Samson struggles many sins, but his two main ones I believe are sex and pride. Over and over again, he pursues women to fulfill his sexual desires. The young woman in Timnah, the prostitute in Gaza, Delilah in Sorek. And maybe others. And it's become a vicious cycle: he goes after sex in all the wrong ways, and he gets hurt or attacked. He then tries again, probably to cover up his painful memories, only to have it blow up again. By the time he gets to Delilah, he doesn't have it in him to really love, only to satisfy himself and to play games. But then, his desire for true love pops up and he lets his guard down and is betrayed because he gave his love to the wrong person.

People, this story has played out again and again for so many in so many ways. Many think sex is no big deal, it just a physical act that doesn't mean anything. And either you get hurt like Samson, fooling yourself that you don't need love until you fall for a Delilah with evil intentions, or you become so hardened that it really does mean nothing to you and you experience sex as only a cheap commodity, devoid of any meaning, and hurting those you use.

God designed sex for so much more, to be a reminder of what it means to have true intimacy; deep relationships where we share our very bodies and souls in a loving space between a man and a woman as a husband and wife. Ephesian 5: 31-32 says "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. Sex was intended to be more than just a physical act, there's mystery to it that the bible is saying represents how Jesus loves His church and desires to be very close to His people. It's not a cheap commodity to have just anywhere with anyone but a beautiful gift to be shared in a sacred covenant.

But Samson thinks he's above that, those morals don't apply to him. The reason Samson thinks he can go to Gaza or Sorek and pursue Philistine women and not suffer is because of pride. He won't fall; Samson can't lose. He's God's champion, undefeated. He's destroyed vineyards with foxes, he's killed thousands with the jawbone of a donkey, God provided water from a spring for him out of nothing. He's legendary. And like Esau who despised his birthright and treated God's blessing as a cheap commodity, Samson doesn't respect what God has given him. One time, he killed a lion and then later ate honey from it's carcass, showing he didn't take his Nazirite vow seriously. A proud man like Samson doesn't see God's blessings with gratitude, he takes them for granted. So, when the Philistines finally shave his head, it's not really the loss of hair that leads to him being imprisoned and blinded, it's because he treated God and His ways with contempt.

Samson is broken and blind, humiliated and enslaved. As much as we do sin, it also does us. You don't do sin, sin does you! You get what I'm saying? In one sense, yes, we do the sin, we are guilty and need a savior. But on the other hand, as long we think we are in control and sin is something that we can fix ourselves, we'll struggle to see the need for a savior. We think we can stop whenever we want, that we're in charge. But then it spins out of our control, and we realize sin has us trapped; we can't save ourselves.

Thank God, no one is too lost for God to rescue. Even in that state, God can still reach and use Samson.

Judges 16: 28-31

Then Samson called to the LORD 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." And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines." 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. Then his brothers and all his family came down and took him and brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. He had judged Israel twenty years.

The Humble Return

I want to focus on Samson's family right now. Samon's father is dead, most likely his mom is too. It's not hard to imagine they died feeling confused about their son. What went wrong? why did he leave God's people and ways? But I'd like to think they also knew the same God who could turn their barrenness into a beautiful baby boy could also bring their lost son home from the pit. Parents, do you believe that? The father in the parable of the prodigal son says at the end, your brother was dead and now is alive! God is the god of opening the eyes of the blind, of bringing the lost home, the dead back to life. Over and over again we see that throughout scripture in many miracles, including in Samson's life. He's broken and blind and yet reaches out in a somewhat pitiful prayer to God, asking Him to use him for the purpose he was created for, even though it will cost him his life. And while he died in Philistia, he was buried in Israel, symbolizing that in the next life he made it to the true promised land. And I'd like to think his parents were there to greet him in heaven, experiencing joy unimaginable at the sight of their son in his true form, devoid of

the scars and anger and pride that marked his sinful attitude, purified and cleansed by the grace of God. And it was better that's how they saw his return. There's no feeling of shame or judgment, no "I told you so" or "you should have listened!" All heavenly reunions are pure joy with wonder at what God has done. A Faith that returns believes God is able to bring all of us home.

Samson reaches out with a simple, unpolished prayer. He's been stuck in prison in hard labor. He hasn't had the ability to read scripture, to get baptized, to perform rituals at the temple. But He does call God "Lord". And he humbly asks to be remembered, because he finally knows it's know about his strength or hair or family background or location, none of it matters, only that God knows him and he knows God. And God answers that prayer. For all of us prodigals, while we were still a long way off, the Father sees us and runs to us.

Christ Connection: Jesus Fulfilled the Promise

Samson was a real life prodigal son and the story of the gospel. Born to loving parents with a promise from God, but falls into sin, losing the blessing. But God makes a way for him to humbly return and have victory. That's humanity's story from Adam to us, we all we made for God's blessing, but we have fallen and lost it, but God made a way through the perfect hero, Jesus, so we can return to Him.

Samson was born with a prophecy to save, so was Jesus.

Samson was sent to defeat the Philistines, Jesus was sent to defeat sin and death.

Samson gave into temptation, Jesus overcame it.

Samson was blinded by pride and then was truly blind, Jesus saw all things and opened eyes to God's grace and love.

Samson was arrested, imprisoned, mocked and died as broken man, Jesus was arrested, imprisoned, mocked and died as the perfectly innocent man to be the perfect sacrifice.

Samson's death was a temporary victory. Jesus's death defeated sin once and for all because he lived the life that Samson and the rest of us could not. And we get the victory and eternal life that Jesus gives.

Families who confess they've given up or become bitter and want to renew a commitment to pray for their prodigals and remember that God loves them more than they ever will, please stand.

People who confess they let their pride and lust lead them away from God and want to purify and humble their hearts, please stand.

And the everyone else, let's all stand to commit to looking to Jesus as our hero, to honor and praise Him for His victory over sin and death. Through Him all can return.