

Samson the naughty Nazirite

Pre-reading – Judges 13-16 needs to be read in advance of this Bible study.

Groups – The sheet at the end of this pack could be given to smaller groups of 3-4 people.

Introduction

Through romantic relationships you can see some of the best of humanity, but in romantic relationships you can also see the worst. In these intense relationships you are in a place of great power to cause great hurt or build up something strong and Godly. Often in relationships we get to places where we need to show Kingdom Courage to reject the worldly expectations on us, and give our relationships to God.

One of the worst examples of how to deal with relationships in the Bible would be a certain long-haired colossus called Samson. In this study we are going to look at Samson, what he was called to, and how his romantic relationships led him astray. We are going to look at the primary calling on our lives and how our relationships can aid us, rather than being a snare as they were for Samson.

Starter questions (5 mins)

- (1) What words come to mind when you think of Samson?
- (2) Do you think the Bible gives good advice on relationships?

Chosen and set apart

First, we are going to look at Samson's birth, and it was a very special birth, announced by an angel, like someone else you might know, but that is skipping ahead a little.

Samson's life is recorded in the book of Judges, this is over 1000 years before Jesus.

Read Judges 13:1-5

13 *Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, so the LORD delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years.*

² *A certain man of Zorah, named Manoah, from the clan of the Danites, had a wife who was childless, unable to give birth. ³ The angel of the LORD appeared to her and said, "You are barren and childless, but you are going to become pregnant and give birth to a son. ⁴ Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean. ⁵ You will become pregnant and have a son whose head is never to be touched by a razor because the boy is to be a Nazirite, dedicated to God from the womb. He will take the lead in delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines."*

Questions (5 mins)

- (1) What kind of land was Israel at this point?
- (2) What is Samson called to at birth?
- (3) What is similar in our own call?
- (4) How should relationships aid you in this calling?

If you read Numbers 6 it tells us that a Nazirite chooses to live his life as an offering to God. The Nazirite vow was a set of outward signs to show that a person was honouring God with their life. Samson was to offer his life and through him God would deliver the nation from the Philistines.

God promises a similar status in our lives. In 1 Peter, he calls all Christians a 'royal priesthood'. As a global community of believers, we are a holy people set apart for God. But we are also a people who

will work to minister to the needs of the world, and through whom God's saving presence will be revealed on the earth.

Relationships

God reveals himself primarily through relationships of all kinds. God works through friends, family, or colleagues. But now we are going to look at a particular type of relationship, the romantic kind.

We see next in the story that Samson wants a relationship. It was a little less complicated back then to find a girl. The rollercoaster of dating, the perils of Tinder, and the risk of blind dates didn't exist. Samson just went with his parents and picked someone.

Read Judges 14:1-9

Once Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw a Philistine woman. ² Then he came up, and told his father and mother, "I saw a Philistine woman at Timnah; now get her for me as my wife." ³ But his father and mother said to him, "Is there not a woman among your kin, 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, because she pleases me."

⁵ Samson went down to Timnah together with his father and mother. As they approached the vineyards of Timnah, suddenly a young lion came roaring toward him. ⁶ The Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon him so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat. But he told neither his father nor his mother what he had done. ⁷ Then he went down and talked with the woman, and he liked her.

⁸ Some time later, when he went back to marry her, he turned aside to look at the lion's carcass, and in it he saw a swarm of bees and some honey. ⁹ He scooped out the honey with his hands and ate as he went along. When he rejoined his parents, he gave them some, and they too ate it. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey from the lion's carcass.

Questions (5 mins)

- (1) What senses does Samson use in picking a wife?
- (2) What problems do his parents see in this match?
- (3) How does this match not honour God's will?
- (4) How do you pick a potential partner?

The lion (verse 5) shows the peril that Samson is in, and how through this marriage he was drawing his family into danger. He had left the path laid out for him, which presented dangers for him and it does for us now. Following our own desires and ignoring God's advice will put us in a perilous place. Are our relationships taking us from the path God has laid out for us?

Does this mean all romantic relationships are wrong? Certainly not, but we need to learn to discern which are good for us and which are not. The best way is to look at how God wants us to act out romantic relationships; this is primarily through his covenantal relationship of marriage.

Read Genesis 2:18-24

¹⁸ The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

¹⁹ Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. ²¹ So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with

flesh. ²² Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

²³ The man said,

*“This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called ‘woman,’
for she was taken out of man.”*

²⁴ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Confusion

The word ‘helper’, sounds controversial, it sounds demeaning, but this is the Hebrew word ‘ezer’, and it is used in other places to describe God himself. This is not a put down, but an amazing word to use, far stronger than the English translation.

We see in this passage that even though Adam walked with God in the garden, this wasn’t enough for him. God says it is not good for us to be alone. This is a powerful truth about all our relationships, romantic or otherwise. We are meant to live in community and we are designed to live out our faith with others.

Questions (5 mins)

- (1) How is Eve created? (v22)
- (2) What happens to unite the man and woman? (v24)
- (3) How does this contrast with the way Samson chose a wife?
- (4) What does the picture of ‘one flesh’ teach us about?

The forming of ‘one flesh’ shows the permanence of marriage between husband and wife. Once married we are meant to stay in that one relationship. Through the years of commitment, God brings blessing by allowing things to grow that can only flourish in a place of stability and relentless love.

Marriage is a place where we can come together with someone else and become more than we were before. We become more by giving ourselves to the new flesh that is created. This can sometimes be an arduous process as we must give up our old single self. Marriage is a picture which points to another union, an eternal union. The bridegroom, Christ, will one day be united with the His bride, the Church, and we will each be given a new flesh and renewed completely.

What do you want from your relationship?

Looking back at Samson, the engagement didn’t last long. He quickly got into disputes with the family, his new wife was pledged to someone else, and he ended up having quite a few fights with the Philistines. But God was working through the mess, pulling Samson back to his original calling to save his people, despite his disobedience. The Philistines really wanted to get him, but it wasn’t working because God was protecting him. It was all going so well. Then Samson met another woman!

Read Judges 16:4-6

⁴ Some time later, he fell in love with a woman in the Valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah. ⁵ The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, “See if you can lure him into showing you the secret of

his great strength and how we can overpower him so we may tie him up and subdue him. Each one of us will give you eleven hundred shekels of silver."

⁶ So Delilah said to Samson, "Tell me the secret of your great strength and how you can be tied up and subdued."

Questions (5 mins)

- (1) What was the Philistines' plan?
- (2) What was Delilah trying to get out of the relationship? (v5)
- (3) Do we enter relationships wanting anything in particular?
- (4) How does this contrast to the marriage relationship described earlier?

Delilah was using Samson to get money, and on another level she wanted the fame of being the woman that took down the enemy Samson. We often enter relationships wanting things, maybe not as blatantly as Delilah. We enter relationship to provide us support, to give us family lives, to give life complete, to show we have made it.

Delilah is searching things that will give her help in her current situation, she looks short-term. We spend a lot of our lives searching for momentary satisfaction, instead of investing for the future. The biblical picture of marriage is long term commitment from both parties to follow God's path, supporting each other on the way.

Temptation

Delilah nags and nags to get Samson to reveal his secret. As the passage goes on we see her wear him down until he gives in to her.

Read Judges 16:15-22

¹⁵ Then she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when you won't confide in me? This is the third time you have made a fool of me and haven't told me the secret of your great strength." ¹⁶ With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was sick to death of it.

¹⁷ So he told her everything. "No razor has ever been used on my head," he said, "because I have been a Nazirite dedicated to God from my mother's womb. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man."

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. ¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ 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.

²¹ 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. ²² But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.

Questions (5 mins)

- (1) What was the sign of Samson's dedication to God? (v17)
- (2) What are the signs in our life that we are devoted to God?

(3) How can relationships cause us to lose these things?

(4) Samson ends the relationship bound. How can some relationships bind us?

The saddest thing about this is that Samson didn't realise that God had left him. He was so caught up in the relationship and trying to make it work, that he didn't realise. It is so easy for this to happen even in good relationships. You can find your hair, here symbolising your dedication to God, being removed to please your partner. You can even find that a relationship is something that leaves you in chains, unable to get out.

This is a sad story. Remember Samson is the strong man who is constantly trusting too much in his own strength. Here he holds out and holds out, until his own strength fails him. He believed that he could keep his vows to God, but he decided in the face of temptation that pleasing Delilah was more important than his vows.

The death of Samson

The story of Samson is a signpost to another story of a special baby announced by an angel. Samson fell short again and again, but this baby would face the temptation and not fail, He would save God's people. In Samson's death we see God's grace and salvation for a people who don't deserve it, and we see Jesus Christ.

Read Judges 16:25-30

²⁵ While they were in high spirits, they shouted, "Bring out Samson to entertain us." So they called Samson out of the prison, and he performed for them.

When they stood him among the pillars, ²⁶ Samson said to the servant who held his hand, "Put me where I can feel the pillars that support the temple, so that I may lean against them." ²⁷ Now the temple was crowded with men and women; all the rulers of the Philistines were there, and on the roof were about three thousand men and women watching Samson perform. ²⁸ Then Samson prayed to the LORD, "Sovereign LORD, remember me. Please, God, strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes." ²⁹ Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, ³⁰ Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived.

Questions (5 mins)

(1) Why was Samson in this situation?

(2) What things does Samson do which he had spent his life not doing?

(3) How did God deliver his people in this action?

(4) Think of the similarities and differences between this and the story of Jesus' death.

In his death Samson died for his God, he died to self. In his life he so often fell short, but in death he gave it all up for God. This is the aim of each of our lives. We are all set apart for God, as Samson was, and we all need to aim to give him our whole lives, which includes our romantic relationships.

Dying to self in relationships

Samson is named in Hebrews 11 as a hero of faith. This shows that heroes of faith can be fallen, broken people. On the cross we along with Samson received forgiveness, and with this comes a freedom from any chains from past relationships that might hold you back.

Relationships can be a wonderful place where we can learn to give ourselves sacrificially to each other. They can be a place where we can share redeeming love with each other, gradually bringing each other closer and closer to the Father.

With relationships the questions we need to ask is: "As the relationship grows does it draw me closer to God or further away?"

Group questions (5 mins)

- (1) Which lesson do you draw most from Samson's life?
- (2) In what ways can relationships help each other draw closer to God?
- (3) How does this apply in different ways in relationships before and after marriage?

Fight

We always need to remember that our relationships, are a spiritual battleground, where a fight goes on at what can be our very weakest point. In this struggle the enemy tries to confuse us, taking good things and corrupting them. We must invest time to pray and struggle to bring our relationships back to the picture God first introduced in Creation. We must remember the story of Samson, where God brought good from a fallen man in a broken situation. We must remember that we are all in need of redemption. But we must also act, refocusing our view of relationships to see the deeper meaning behind them, letting go of our unhealthy dependence, and focusing instead on our Lord.

Response (15 minutes)

Pray for each member of the group.

You may consider praying into:

- Hurt caused by relationships gone wrong.
- For relationships to be strengthened.
- For those who feel alone.

Samson the wayward Nazirite – Group Handout

Questions

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Introduction (5 minutes)

- (1) What words come to mind when you think of Samson?
- (2) Do you think the Bible gives good advice on relationships?

Chosen and set apart (Judges 13:1-5) (5 minutes)

- (1) What kind of land was Israel at this point?
- (2) What is Samson called to at birth?
- (3) What is similar in our own call?
- (4) How should relationships aid you in this calling?

Relationships

Judges 14:1-9 (5 minutes)

- (1) What senses does Samson use in picking a wife?
- (2) What problems do his parents see in this match?
- (3) How does this match not honour God's will?
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Genesis 2:18-24 (5 minutes)

- (1) How is Eve created? (v22)
- (2) What happens to unite the man and woman? (v24)
- (3) How does this contrast with the way Samson chose a wife?
- (4) What does the picture of 'one flesh' teach us about?

What do you want from your relationship? (Judges 16:4-6)

- (1) What was the Philistines' plan? (5 minutes)
- (2) What was Delilah trying to get out of the relationship? (v5)
- (3) Do we enter relationships wanting anything in particular?
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Temptation (Judges 16:15-22) (5 minutes)

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- (4) Samson ends the relationship bound. How can some relationships bind us?

The death of Samson (Judges 16:25-30) (5 minutes)

- (1) Why was Samson in this situation?
- (2) What things does Samson do which he had spent his life not doing?
- (3) How did God deliver his people in this action?
- (4) Think of the similarities and differences between this and the story of Jesus' death.

Dying to self in relationships (5 minutes)

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Response (15 minutes)

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Bible passages

Judges 13:1-5

13 Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, so the LORD delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years. ² A certain man of Zorah, named Manoah, from the clan of the Danites, had a wife who was childless, unable to give birth. ³ The angel of the LORD appeared to her and said, "You are barren and childless, but you are going to become pregnant and give birth to a son. ⁴ Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean. ⁵ You will become pregnant and have a son whose head is never to be touched by a razor because the boy is to be a Nazirite, dedicated to God from the womb. He will take the lead in delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines."

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Judges 16:4-6

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Judges 16:25-30

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