



Lesson Four: Losing My Witness for God (College/Adult)

Lesson Theme

Being called by God to accomplish His purposes is a privilege, but His work in and through me can and will be derailed when I continually give in to the temptation to sin. However, God's ability to accomplish His purposes in this world is not dependent upon my obedience—He is able to accomplish His will in spite of my sinfulness.

Theme Verse

"Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails." (Proverbs 19:21 NIV)

"The impulses of the human heart may run wild, but the Eternal's plan will prevail." (Proverbs 19:21 The VOICE)

Inductive Bible Discussion Guide

Brief Explanation

- This discussion guide is designed for just that... discussion. When I lead discussion group Bible studies, I do not have answers anywhere in the material, nor do I use a leader's guide with all the answers written in.
- This is INTENTIONAL! I believe that the discipleship process should be an encounter with God, not just listening to someone else tell you what words to write down to fill in the blanks.
- Our goal is to help you facilitate discovery learning for your students. As the questions are asked, every participant (including the leader) is required to search God's Word to discover the appropriate morsel of truth. When facilitators are 'armed' with all the answers, they are less likely to allow the time needed for individuals to process the question and formulate an answer.
- Don't be afraid of silence! That discovery process is the key to the success or failure of this process. It is in those moments of silence that we stop teaching and the Holy Spirit takes over!
- We cannot forget what Jesus said in John 16:13: *“when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth.”*
- A “Lesson Commentary” has been included with this packet. We encourage you to study the material contained in the commentary, but do not try to teach (aka lecture) your group from that material. Let it serve as a source of information for you to draw upon to help give context and perspective to the group discussion.
- For a deeper look at the issues presented herein, please look at the "Judges – Teacher's Guide" or listen to the corresponding sermons (www.templerogers.org/obe/judges_resources/)
- For a deeper discussion of how to lead an inductive style, Bible discussion group, please download the “Leading Small Group Bible Studies” resource by clicking [HERE](#).

Ice Breaker Questions

OPTION #1: TWO TRUTHS AND A LIE

- Have each of your students tell three things about themselves—two of the statements should be true and one should be a lie.
- After each student shares, let the class guess which statement is a lie.
- **Application:** “In our lesson today, we will hear how Delilah tried to get Samson to tell her the truth about where his strength came from, but he kept telling her lies.

OPTION #2: A SHORT DRAMA ABOUT INTEGRITY

- Print out two copies of the skit from the **Lesson 4 – Activity Sheets Packet**. You might want a third copy to keep for yourself.
- Before class begins, choose two of your more dramatic students to play the parts of Morgan and Jessie.
- Have them read over the lines a few times before class begins but assure them that they will be able to keep the script in front of them.
- **Application:** “As we study through the life of Samson today, we will see how that his integrity was not what it should have been either.”

Discussion Guide

Many of us are at least aware of some of the details in the Samson narrative—if for no other reason because of its scandalous subject matter. As we read the story of his life in Judges 13-16, we come to realize that Samson is not a great example of a godly leader. “Instead, we find by far the most flawed character in the book: a violent, impulsive, sexually addicted, emotionally immature and selfish man.” (Keller 135)

Samson’s Exceptionally Flawed Character

What are some examples of Samson’s extreme character flaws?

- Because the story of Samson has so many sub-plots, it is impossible to cover each one in the time allotted.

- In order to get the students into the Scripture for themselves, assign different passages to small groups and ask them to analyze Samson’s attitude and behavior in order to identify Samson’s character flaws.
- Choose from the following passages from the book of Judges:
 - Judges 14:1-4
 - Judges 14:5-9
 - Judges 14:10-20
 - Judges 15:1-8
 - Judges 16:1-3
- After giving each small group the opportunity to identify Samson’s character flaws, have each group share their answers.
- For more information on each passage, consult the Lesson Commentary section at the end of this lesson.
- Ask them to only share one characteristic at a time, and take turns among the groups. Write their answers on a poster or marker board.

After examining Samson’s life, do you agree with the author when he refers to Samson as a violent, impulsive, sexually addicted, emotionally immature and selfish man? Why or why not?

***Samson lived a life of disobedience toward God—
putting his pride, pleasure and prestige above all else.
His life was dedicated to God from birth, but he continually
and consistently disregarded God’s will in all that he did.***

Flawed Character Leads to Failure in Life – Judges 16:4-22

In verse 4, the Scripture explains that Samson fell in love with a woman named Delilah. Realizing Samson’s weaknesses with women, the leaders of the Philistine nation coerced/bribed her to discover the source of Samson’s

strength. They offered her wealth, power and influence if she could deliver Samson into their hands.

What did she do to try to discover the source of his strength?

How many failed attempts did she have before he relented? Discuss each.

Once Delilah realized that Samson had told her the truth, what happened next? What did the Philistines do to Samson?

Humble Attitude Leads to Faith in God – Judges 16:23-25

Who was assembled and what was their purpose for coming together?

Read verse 28 again. What new attitude do you see in Samson?

Why do you think God returned Samson's strength to him?
(consider Hebrews 11:32-34)

Godly Character Traits

In our first lesson about Othniel, we read 2 Peter 1:5-9 about the fruit of the Spirit. How did Samson's life exhibit these characteristics?

Is God able to accomplish His purposes through us in spite of our disobedience and flawed character traits?

- The natural answer is to say, “No. God will not work through those who are disobedient to him.”
- The evidence of Scripture does not support this claim.
- Being called by God to accomplish His purposes is a privilege. His work in and through me can and will be derailed when I continually give in to the temptation to sin.
- However, God’s ability to accomplish His purposes in this world is not dependent upon my obedience—He is able to accomplish His will in spite of my sinfulness.

Becoming Weak to Be Made Strong – Judges 16:28-30

What was the result of Samson regaining his strength?

How does Samson’s story speak to the Christian life today?

- Galatians 6:7-8 – There Are Consequences to Sin
- James 4:10 & 1 Peter 5:6 – Humble Yourself
- 2 Corinthians 12:10 – When I Am Weak, Then I Am Strong
- Romans 8:28 – Not All Things Are Good, But They Work Together for His Good Purposes

Activity Sheets/Coloring Pages

- Download the **Lesson 4 – Activity Sheets Packet** for coloring sheets and other activities for your students!

Lesson Commentary

Judges 14:1 – 16:31

Many of us are at least aware of some of the details in the Samson narrative—if for no other reason because of its scandalous subject matter. If we read the account of his life as “part of the whole narrative of the book of Judges, we will find it to be at least perplexing and probably disturbing. As Israel’s spiritual condition grows worse and worse, the scene seems to be set for a great judge/leader, perhaps the greatest of all... Instead, we find by far the most flawed character in the book: a violent, impulsive, sexually addicted, emotionally immature and selfish man.”¹

God designated Samson to be a leader in Israel from the time of his birth. He was to be dedicated as a Nazirite to God from the womb to the grave. The origin of the Nazirite vow is “in Numbers 6:1-21, and contained the three basic stipulations. A Nazirite was not to cut his hair during the period of the vow; was not to drink any produce from vines, alcoholic or non-alcoholic; and was not to have contact with any dead body. The purpose of the Nazirite vow was to ask for God’s special help during a crucial time. It was a sign that you were looking to God with great intensity and focus... the Nazirite vow was made voluntarily and for a definite period of time. But Samson was being born into the Nazirite state involuntarily... and he was to stay a Nazirite all his life.”²

This vow created a higher expectation for the way that Samson would live his life, but Samson continually failed to live up to this expectation. As we said before, Samson’s life became characterized by violence, impulsiveness, sexual addiction and selfishness. This was evidenced in almost all his interactions with others.

What are some examples of Samson’s extreme character flaws?

Judges 14:1-4 – The Philistine Woman

In Judges 14, Samson goes down into a Philistine city and fell in love with a Philistine woman. He returned home to his family to tell them the good news, but they did not see it as good news. Samson proclaimed, “... get her for me, for she is right in my eyes (a.k.a. good looking)” (3). Samson’s reaction was completely impulsive and completely sensual. He is being controlled by his sensual desires. He saw a good looking woman and determined that he had to have her. His parents, however, were not in favor of this union.

Samson was unwilling to listen and rudely insists upon getting his way—like a spoiled child throwing a temper tantrum. To be clear, his parents’ objection was not a racial issue! The prohibition to marry a Philistine woman is not against *inter-racial marriage*, but rather against *inter-faith marriage*.

¹ Keller 135.

² Ibid 126.

“The book of Proverbs extensively explains how proud and foolish it is to be unwilling to listen to the advice of others. Put in its cultural context, Samson’s pride here is even more extreme. In our day it would be more normal for a son to talk back to his parents, but that was not the case in ancient Israel.”³ Proverbs 12:15 explains it clearly when the writer says,

**“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes,
but a wise man listens to advice.”**

Judges 14:5-9 – The Encounter with a Lion

On his way back from Timnah, in the land of the Philistines, Samson was attacked by a young lion, but he killed the lion with his bare hands. He did not want his parents to know about this because of his Nazirite vow which included a prohibition against touching anything that is dead. “As a Nazirite, he cannot touch a dead animal, and should now go straight to the tabernacle for cleansing. But he is on his way to see the woman he wants—clearly his lust overwhelms his vows...”⁴

According to verses 8-9, when he was returning from his trip to Timnah, he found honey bees inside the carcass of the dead lion. Once again, he touched the dead animal when he chose to reach inside to get some of the honey that the bees had made. By doing this, he once again made himself unclean. By giving some of the honey to his parents, he also made them ceremonially unclean.

Samson’s disregard for the sacred nature of his Nazirite vow reveals a real issue with his character.

Judges 14:10-20 – The Wedding Riddle

Bound and determined to marry the Philistine woman, Samson prepared for the wedding feast. Once his wedding guests arrived, Samson made a wager that they would not be able to solve his riddle. The bet is for 30 linen garments and 30 changes of clothes—one for each man. Not being able to solve the riddle, the 30 men extort Samson’s wife to find out the solution to the riddle. She tried and tried to persuade him to tell her the answer to the riddle. Finally, he relented and told her. She then told the wedding guests and they won the bet.

In verses 19-20, Samson reveals his vindictive and violent nature. The Scripture says that “the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon and struck down thirty men of the town and took their spoil and gave the garments to those who had told the riddle” (19). He was so angry that he left his own wedding and returned to his father’s house. He left his fiancé there and her father gave her to another man—his best man.

³ Keller 136-7.

⁴ Keller 143.

Judges 15:1-8 – The Hot Fox Trot

When Samson discovered that his fiancé had been given to another man, he became extremely angry and took out his wrath against everyone in that area. Samson caught 300 foxes, tied their tails together with a torch in between each pair and set them loose to burn all the fields of grain. He felt that he had been treated with dishonor, so he took his vengeance upon everyone!

What are the results of Samson's actions in Judges 14:1 – 15:8?

“Each action prompts a reaction, which brings its own reaction, and the seemingly unbreakable cycle continues”⁵ In Judges 15:10-17, the Philistines prepare for war. Then the Israelites turn on Samson in an effort to appease the Philistines. There were 3,000 men that went down to bring Samson back to the Philistines. Samson allowed the Israelites to deliver him up to the Philistines, but when he got there, he broke free from the rope they had used to tie him up. Then he killed 1,000 Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey.

It is at this point that the Bible records the first prayer ever uttered by God's chosen leader, Samson. In Judges 15:18, Samson prayed, ““You have granted this great salvation by the hand of your servant, and shall I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?” His prayer is neither humble nor faithful; but rather, it is demanding and full of complaint. But even though Samson spoke to God with a terrible attitude and complaining spirit, God answered his prayer by providing the water that he needed.

This just shows what a vindictive, self-absorbed, emotionally-immature, and sexually-addicted man that Samson really was. “All his actions against the Philistines have been self-serving, to get him out of the trouble that followed his decision to go to the Philistine town of Timnah”⁶ in search for a bride.

Twenty years pass by but Samson is still the self-absorbed, sin-filled man he was in his youth. What did he do in Judges 16:1-3 to prove this?

According to Judges 16:1-3, Samson not only went to the land of the Philistines—he went to the capital city of Gaza; he not only went looking for a woman—he went to spend time there with a prostitute! Nothing has changed! Samson is still a vindictive, self-absorbed, emotionally-immature, and sexually-addicted man. “For Israel's judge to spend the night with a Philistine prostitute (v 1), allowing himself to be surrounded (v 2), is not just disobedient, it is foolish.”⁷ It almost seems that Samson is not just addicted to sex, but he is addicted to dangerous, risky encounters with forbidden women.

⁵ Keller 146.

⁶ Ibid 151.

⁷ Ibid.

Samson lived a life of disobedience toward God—putting his pride, pleasure and prestige above all else. His life was dedicated to God from birth, but he continually and consistently disregarded God’s will in all that he did.

This predisposition toward disobedience culminated in Samson’s relationship with the Philistine woman named Delilah. What did she do to try to destroy his usefulness in the work of God?

In Judges 16:4, the Scripture explains that Samson fell in love with a woman named Delilah. Realizing Samson’s weaknesses with women, the leaders of the Philistine nation coerced/bribed her to betray the source of Samson’s strength. “For Delilah, it means that if she could turn him over to them, she would be a national heroine. So the potential wealth, power, and influence being held out to her is very great. She would be set up for the rest of her life.”⁸

Surprisingly, Delilah is very straightforward with Samson. She simply asked him to reveal the source of his incredible strength.

The first time she asked him, Samson lied to Delilah telling her that he could be subdued but that his attackers would need to use seven fresh bowstrings to tie him down. This would cause him to be as weak as any other man. Delilah tied him up and invited the men into her bedroom to ambush Samson; however, the bowstrings were easily snapped. The men lying in wait in the inner chamber dared not move when Samson freed himself from the bowstrings.

After chastising Samson for not telling her the truth, she asked him once again. For a second time, Samson lied to her. She did as he said but the ‘new ropes’ were unable to hold him. This angered Delilah for once again there were men lying in wait to capture Samson. The Philistines were growing weary of these failed attempts. When asked a third time, Samson lied to her again, but this time the lie was coming closer to the truth—he included his hair in this lie.

Finally, Delilah pulled out the ultimate in relational blackmail when she said, “How can you say, ‘I love you,’ when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me these three times...” This alone was not enough for Samson to give in, but she continued to torment him with this day after day. In fact, the Contemporary English Version clearly explains what happened in verse 16. It says, “Delilah started nagging and pestering him day after day, until he couldn’t stand it any longer.” Samson finally gave in and told her the truth (17).

According to Judges 16:18-20, Delilah called the Philistine soldiers back one more time. She got Samson to fall asleep with his head in her lap, and then a man came in and shaved his head. She cried out, “Samson, the Philistines are attacking.” Once again, he got up to battle against them, but “he did not realize that the LORD had stopped helping him.”

⁸ Keller 153.

What did the Philistines do to Samson once he was captured? What effect did this have upon him?

Throughout the life/ministry of Samson, God has been using all of the sin-filled behavior of Samson to bring about confrontation with the Philistines (e.g. desire to marry a Philistine woman, burning the fields with the foxes, killing the 1,000 with a donkey's jawbone, etc.). Here in the last moments of Samson's life, he is once again put in a situation of confrontation with the Philistines—only this time, Samson is the one who is being shamed and ridiculed.

The Scripture says that they gouged out his eyes, bound him in bronze shackles and forced him into hard labor in prison. For the strongest man in the world to be subjugated like this was truly humiliating. But God used this humiliation to bring a new spirit of humility into Samson's life. In fact, God uses Samson through this situation in a greater way than he had throughout the rest of his time serving as the judge/leader of Israel.

The Philistines had gathered together, in the temple dedicated to the worship of Dagon, to rejoice in their victory over Samson and the God of Israel and to offer a sacrifice to their god. This feast turned into a drunken celebration and the people called for Samson to be brought before them as a form of entertainment. According to Judges 16:27, the place was full of men and women—all of the 'lords' or leaders of the Philistines were there. The place was large enough that 3,000 people were up on the roof of the building. In essence, everyone who was anyone in the nation of the Philistines had gathered together that day for this celebration!

When Samson was brought out to entertain the crowds, he asked to be able to "feel the pillars on which the house rests" so he could lean against them. Here was Samson—standing before this raucous mob—blind and being ridiculed. "The scene is set; and, for only the second recorded time in his life, Samson prays. Always before, he has assumed that he will be strong, and has used his strength to save himself (14:5-6, 19; 15:3-5, 13-17; 16:3, 8, 12, 14)... Now, for the first time, blind and weak, he simply asks. 'O Sovereign Lord, remember me. O God, please strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes' (v 28)."⁹ After this humble request, Samson's strength returns for one last time.

Why do you think God returned Samson's strength to him?

It seems that Samson has had a change of attitude—there is a new attitude of humility demonstrated here—and for the first time, he is exercising faith in God to give him the ability to accomplish this great feat. Hebrews 11:32-34 must also be considered in this situation for the New Testament often functions as a commentary for the Old Testament. The writer of Hebrews says:

⁹ Keller 161.

“³²And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, **Samson**, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, **stopped the mouths of lions**,³⁴ quenched the power of fire, **escaped the edge of the sword**, were **made strong out of weakness**, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.” (emphasis added)

Throughout his life, “Samson’s real temptation had been to believe that we are blessed by God because of something great and deserving in us—complacently to see what he had been given by grace as rightfully his, to use as he wished. That, rather than Delilah, was his real sin. It is so hard to remember that we do what we do only because of God’s grace, and that God’s grace is given so that we might do what is pleasing to him and in the service of his people.”¹⁰

What was the result of Samson regaining his strength?

Samson sacrificed himself by demolishing the temple to Dagon. When he pushed over the support pillars in the middle of the building, the roof—which had over 3,000 people on it—collapsed and all the people on top and inside the building were killed.

In one act, Samson obliterated the nation of the Philistines by eradicating every one of its leaders. In fact, the Scripture tells us that “the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life” (v 30).

How does Samson’s story speak to the Christian life today?

“Becoming and continuing as a Christian is about the same pattern—becoming weak to become strong. Only those who admit they are unrighteous receive the righteousness of Christ. Only those who know their life and strength are theirs purely because of grace are not living in the grip of fear, boredom, and despondency. Only those who know their own weakness are able to know God-given inner strength; the strength which enables us to avoid the pitfalls of Samson’s life: pride, lust, anger, vengeance and complacency.”¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid 162.

¹¹ Keller 164-5.