



Time to Reflect.

- In what ways do we seek to draw close to God and how have we committed ourselves to growing deeper in our relationships with Him?
- Are you easily influenced? In working through a specific issue, is the will of God more important than pleasing other people?

Last week we thought about the story of Ruth and we reflected on her faithfulness and dedication. We discerned themes of hope and trust, and we were challenged to put our faith into action and embrace humility. Ultimately we were reminded that God is there for us. This week we move to consider the story of Samson. This is an epic story that grabs our attention from the very beginning. In only four chapters we have angelic appearances, twists and turns, high drama, intrigue, and much to challenge us as we seek to draw closer to God.

“Samson is such a rollicking, entertaining, break-the-mold fellow that we have become preoccupied with him. We must not allow our focus on the saviour God raises up to eclipse the God who saves.”

(Dale Ralph Davis, *Judges: Such A Great Salvation*, p157)

Character Profile

- The story of Samson can be found in Judges 13-16. These four chapters covers aspects of his life, literally from birth to death.
- One phrase appears multiple times in these chapters. **“The Spirit of the Lord came upon him.”** This consistently draws our attention to the calling that God placed on Samson’s life – a calling that was made clear to his parents even before he was born.
- Judges 13:1 sets the context for everything that will unfold in coming chapters. We are told that the Israelites had drifted away from God. The phrase **“...did evil in the eyes of the Lord...”** is a recurring expression in the Book of Judges and this reminds us how easy it can be to drift away from being the people that God would have us be.
- It is important to realise that even when we drift away from God He never stops loving us. This is also evident in the case of the Israelites. Samson was destined to begin the process of delivering God’s people from Philistine oppression (v5). This was a massive calling for Samson and as part of this calling he was to be **“...set apart to God from birth”** (Judges 13:5).
- This gets us thinking about focus and commitment in our relationships with God.
- There is an interesting lesson about prayer recorded in Judges 13:8-9. Manoah, Samon’s father, prayed to God and we are told that God heard his prayer. This is a timely reminder that God does indeed hear our prayers. God is deeply personal and accessible.

- Dale Ralph Davis writes, **“We will trivialise prayer whenever we forget the repeated miracle it involves, the gracious condescension of the King of glory, who stoops down to listen to our verbs and nouns, our adverbs and questions, our groans and our tears.”** (*Judges: Such A Great Salvation*, p161)
- We know little about Samson’s formative years. Ch13 simply records his birth and tells us **“He grew and the Lord blessed him, and the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him...”** (Judges 13:24)
- As we enter Judges 14 it becomes clear (v3) that Samson was strong willed. Yet even through this display of human willfulness, God was at work (v4). We are reminded here that God does indeed move in mysterious ways.
- We recall the words of Isaiah 55:8, **“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.”** This is evident in the life of Samson.
- There is much about secrets in Judges 14 – God’s purpose with Samson, the slaying of the lion, the secret of the honey, and the mysterious riddle.
- The riddle, in particular, became a war of wits between Samson and the Philistines. We even get the sense that Samson enjoyed this verbal duel. At a deeper level, (v10-18) highlight the emergence of Samson’s weakness. He could be pressurised and influenced.
- In Judges 14:17 and then again in Judges 16:16 we see how Samson was susceptible to giving in. This gets us thinking about how easily influenced we can be.
- At the beginning of Judges 15 we see how Samson didn’t bear any grudges, and we should commend him for this. Throughout his life there is ample evidence of how he experienced the favour of God (e.g. the provision of water in Judges 15:18).
- He was also given the opportunity to lead God’s people for a period of twenty years (Judges 15:11). This was both a blessing and a challenge, as all types of leadership can so often be.
- In Judges 15:11 we see how the Israelites were so satisfied with the status quo that they were prepared to do anything for a quiet life. This mindset can develop so easily and it quickly becomes regressive as opposed to progressive.
- Dale Ralph Davis suggests, **“We are near to hopeless when we begin to adopt Judah’s slogan: it has always been this way – how can we expect to change anything.”** (*Judges: Such A Great Salvation*, p181)
- Perhaps the most tragic part of Samson’s life was how **“...he did not know that the Lord had left him.”** (Judges 16:20) This ranks as one of the most tragic statements in the Old Testament. Through the Delilah episode, Samson was unaware that he has betrayed his calling.
- Delilah was cool, calculated, and driven by the thought of wealth. She manipulated Samson and this led to his capture and eventual death.
- The story of Samson and Delilah is certainly gripping and as we read chapter 16 we get drawn into the narrative so easily. We see a dramatic ending (Judges 16:23-31) and it is like the ending to a Hollywood blockbuster.
- But there is a danger here – that the story and drama actually overshadows the practical lesson which is so important.
- Dale Ralph Davis concludes, **“...Samson’s tragedy still speaks: watch out, lest you abandon the divine call, leave your first love, and forfeit the divine presence.”** (*Judges: Such A Great Salvation*, p187)
- We are challenged to be faithful to God and keep focused on His calling on our lives.