

{un}faithful - 7
Week of March 19, 2017
Bay Park Life Groups –Leader’s Guide

When we first started the Judges study we talked about how this book can sometimes read like the script to a Hollywood movie with themes of sex, deception, violence, and the supernatural. The story of Samson, who is arguably the most recognized judge of all, sets us up to see Israel at an all-time low. At initial glance it feels like we’re being set up for the greatest deliverance the Israelites have ever seen, a real chance to become the great nation they used to be. Instead, Tim Keller writes, “we get deep insight into the most flawed character in the book of Judges: a violent, impulsive, sexually addicted, emotionally immature, and selfish man. What we will discover that is even more bizarre, is how the Spirit uses those deep character flaws to fulfill the cycle.”

Read Judges 13:1-25

1. The infamous Judges cycle begins: Israel does evil, then they’re handed over. What should happen next but doesn’t? What does this tell us about Israel’s spiritual state at this time?

Israel doesn’t cry out for rescue from oppression. There is no resistance to the enslavement. The Israelites have basically become pagans. They have completely adopted and adapted to the values, beliefs, and idols of the Philistines. They don’t cry out because they don’t realize they need to – their enslavement is virtually unconscious. Israel, as a nation of God’s distinctive people, are on the verge of extinction.

Read Judges 14:1-16:3

2. We’re told three times that Samson enjoyed Spirit-given strength (14:6, 14:19, 15:14-15). What does he use that strength for each time?

14:6 – to protect himself from a lion

14:19 – to kill 30 innocent men so that he can settle a bet that had lost

15:14-15 – to escape from the Philistines, who are pursuing him because he had killed “many of them” (verse 8) in order to avenge the death of his wife

The point is that each time, his strength is used for his own interests. None of these events even begins to deliver Israel. The second and third events are caused by Samson’s selfishness and pride, not by a desire to rescue his people.

3. We continue to see the Spirit helping Samson but why don’t we see any growth in holiness? How can he be so empowered by the Spirit and yet show no patience, humility, or self-control?

- a. Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-7 and 13:1-3. What does Paul say here that the Spirit gives? What do they need to be accompanied by to stop them from being useless?
- b. Read Galatians 5:19-25. What does Paul say here that the Spirit gives? Which work of the Spirit does Samson have? Which doesn't he have? Which is the sign of true spiritual growth? What happens if we forget this?

1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 13:1-3 – Gifts, for the common good. Love is needed or the gifts are nothing. They must be combined with love so that they're used in the service of God's people.

Galatians 5:19-25 – Fruit, part of which is love. Samson has incredible gifts (namely superhuman strength) but little to no fruit. The Spirit is operating in him, mightily, but his personal spiritual life is a wreck. The sign of real spiritual growth is fruit, not gifting. Gifts are about doing – abilities for serving and helping others, which can be easily used for our own purposes. Fruit is about being – about who we really are. If we forget this we will mistake the operation of gifts for the growth of fruit, and look at how we're serving, or our God-given abilities, as proof that spiritually, all is well. The "proof" of spiritual growth and spiritual health is seeing the fruit of the Spirit growing in our character.

Read Judges 16:4-31

4. How do we see both Samson's priorities and his weaknesses in this section? In verses 19-20, what was the key to Samson's strength?

Women – he cannot resist women he is attracted to. By verse 9 he cannot be in doubt about what Delilah is up to – yet he stays with her. In verse 15 she suggests that Samson doesn't really love her (even though the same could be said about her to him!); and Samson responds by telling her the truth. It seems he cannot bear to risk losing her, even though she is leading him to ruin.

Complacency – Samson has defeated great numbers of Philistines before; he assumes that he will be able to again and again. Even when he, in effect, again breaks his Nazirite vow – by telling Delilah the truth and allowing his hair to be cut – he assumes he will still "go out as before and shake myself free" (verse 21). Samson believes that he will continue to enjoy God-given strength no matter what he does, or how he uses it.

It seems that it was having uncut hair, since it's as his hair is shaved off that "his strength left him". But verse 20 shows us a deeper answer: he was weakened because "the Lord had left him". What mattered was not so much his hair, but God's presence with him. We cannot know why God chose to leave Samson to his own strength (which was in fact no strength at all) at this point, when he had continued to strengthen Samson as he broke other parts of his vow. But the key is that it was while God was "with" Samson that he was strong.

At this point in the story, it's fairly clear that the Israelites have allowed their beliefs and actions

to reflect the surrounding culture, rather than what God had intended for them. We could draw a parallel between the Israelites then and the modern church today.

5. Why is the church adopting the values and beliefs of the world more dangerous than the world oppressing and persecuting the church? Do you see this happening in our culture?

It's subtle. It can happen without us noticing anything. If you are being actively persecuted it is obvious you need to stand firm. But if a local, institutional church slowly, over time, simply becomes like the world, then its members will lose the battle without realizing that they need to fight. They will stop trusting and worshiping God without ever really noticing.

6. How do you feel the pressure to fit in with the surrounding culture in your own life?