

SAMSON WAS A BIBLICAL HERO.

He had every advantage as a boy. His birth was predicted by an angel. He had godly parents who loved him. Samson was uniquely dedicated to God as a Nazirite, and he experienced the power of God's Spirit as a young man. Despite all these favorable factors, Samson failed to embrace his God-given purpose: to use his brute strength to relieve the Israelites from Philistine rule. Samson's legacy, as it unfolds in four chapters of the Book of Judges, is marked by pride, anger, lust, and death.

Time and time again, he made the wrong decisions. He was set apart from the womb to restore Israel to holiness, but ultimately his unfaithfulness to his calling led to his destruction and death. Samson was defiled by his sin, exemplifying a life of wasted resources. He failed to save the day. Yet despite Samson's best efforts to mess up his life, God still used him—and He'll still use us.

Join author Chip Henderson as he examines the major flaws of Samson's life, showing how easily we can waste our lives when we fail to receive God's purpose for us. Whether you're just beginning life as an adult, jaded by failed relationships, struggling from poor decisions, or simply seeking to better understand God's plan for you, this study reveals how you can avoid major pitfalls and embrace that for which God created you.



IN A GROUP BIBLE STUDY? WE HIGHLY RECOMMEND IT.

Check out the *Samson* leader kit, which includes this Bible study, a leader guide, six video segments, a playlist to accompany the study, and more at threadsmedia.com/samson.

CHIP HENDERSON has served as senior pastor of Pinelake Church in Brandon, Mississippi, since 1999. In that time, Pinelake has grown from 700 members to more than 9,000 on five campuses. Chip holds a Ph.D. in Greek and New Testament studies from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and serves on the Board of Directors for the Launch Church Planting Network. He and his wife, Christy, have three children.



ISBN 978-1-4158-7239-0



Published by LifeWay Press. ©2013. 005474750.
Made in the USA.

SAMSON

CHIP HENDERSON

SAMSON

A LIFE WELL WASTED

CHIP HENDERSON

threads
by LifeWay

threads
by LifeWay

In case of loss, please return to:

As a reward: \$

SAMSON

A LIFE WELL WASTED



Published by LifeWay Press®
© 2013 Chip Henderson

No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted in writing by the publisher. Requests for permission should be addressed in writing to LifeWay Press®, One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234-0135.

ISBN: 978-1-4158-7239-0
Item: 005474750

Dewey Decimal Classification Number: 248.84
Subject Heading: CHRISTIAN LIFE \ SAMSON (BIBLICAL JUDGE) \ DISAPPOINTMENT

Printed in the United States of America.

Young Adult Ministry Publishing
LifeWay Church Resources
One LifeWay Plaza
Nashville, Tennessee 37234-0135

We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review LifeWay's doctrinal guideline, please visit www.lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2009 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Holman Christian Standard Bible®, Holman CSB®, and HCSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers. Scripture marked NASB is taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. Scripture marked MSG is taken from The Message. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

Cover design by Leigh Ann Dans and Heather Wetherington.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

OPPORTUNITY LOST 8

How to waste your life

SESSION ONE

PAST REVISITED 12

Don't deal with your daddy issues.

SESSION TWO

LIES UNTOLD 34

Don't tell the truth.

SESSION THREE

ENERGY REFOCUSED 54

Don't control your anger.

SESSION FOUR

GROWTH UNCOMPROMISED 74

Don't cultivate your spiritual life.

SESSION FIVE

PURITY RENEWED 94

Don't control your sex drive.

SESSION SIX

CALLING REPURPOSED 114

Give up hope.

ICON LEGEND



Things to
listen to



Things
to watch



Expanding on
biblical concepts



Fun facts and useful
tidbits of information



Digging deeper into
study concepts



Available tools for
group leaders



On the
Web



MEET THE AUTHOR

CHIP HENDERSON

My name is Chip Henderson. I grew up in Mississippi and Louisiana as the son of a pastor. I earned a degree in Communications Management from Mississippi State University. I also hold a Ph.D. in Greek and New Testament studies from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. My wife, Christy, and I have been married for 21 years and have been blessed with three incredible children: Rachel, McKenzie, and Regan. I'm an avid hunter, runner, and triathlete, and I serve on the Board of Directors for the Launch Church Planting Network.

After surrendering to ministry, I served in two staff positions before beginning my first pastorate nearly 21 years ago. I have served as the senior pastor at Pinelake Church in Brandon, Mississippi, since January 1999. In that time, Pinelake has grown from an average attendance of approximately 700 people to more than 9,000 on five campuses today. I have a passion for seeing Christ bring about powerful life-change in people as well as a commitment to biblical, life-application teaching. I believe this is one way God has used me to help spark dynamic spiritual growth in the life of our church and beyond, and I'm so grateful for the opportunity to serve Him.

I wrote Samson after studying Judges 13–16 in preparation for a morning devotional for a church planting meeting in Tucson, Arizona. I read the tragic story of the incredible potential and purpose of Samson's life and watched as this God-appointed leader's life imploded on the pages of Scripture. My heart was moved as I saw a connection between the fallen leader, Samson, and the men and women of our generation. Never before have we had so much privilege, promise, and potential, and yet never before have we seen so many heartbreaking stories of lives well wasted. My hope and prayer as you engage this study is that you will avoid the mistakes that so commonly mess up our lives, and that the Lord will reveal to you the positive practices of being a spiritual influencer.

OPPORTUNITY LOST

○
How to waste your life



An old man had died and his funeral was in progress. The country preacher talked at length of the good traits of the deceased—what an honest man he was, and what a loving husband and kind father he was. Finally, the widow leaned over and whispered to one of her children, “Go up there and take a look in the coffin and see if that’s your Pa.”

I don’t know about you, but I’ve been to a few funerals where I felt like the preacher had to make a case for why the person in the casket was a Christian. The truth is we preach our funeral while we’re living.

We’re all going to pass away at some point. But what if you died today? Would you be proud of what the preacher would say at your funeral? Would those who get up to speak and attest to your accomplishments have to lie or embellish? Would your family want to look in the casket and make sure they have the right person?

Throughout the coming weeks, we’re going to study the life of a man whose funeral was likely no celebration. Instead it was a reflection upon a life well wasted, and it all begins in the Book of Judges.

Judges sounds like a broken record. It keeps repeating the same cycle in roughly 40-year intervals: sin, captivity, crying out to God, and then deliverance. Rinse and repeat. Joshua had died, and there was no strong man of God to lead the Israelites. The people’s hearts had turned away from God, and their idolatry had led to servitude. God allowed them to be defeated and enslaved to the Canaanites and Philistines.

In Judges 13, at the beginning of Samson’s story, we find the Israelites in bondage to the Philistines. The people haven’t cried out to God yet, but He anticipated it in His sovereignty and began working ahead of them. In His mercy, God raised up a deliverer, a miracle child named Samson.

Samson’s parents, Zoah and Manoah, who weren’t supposed to be able to conceive, were told that Samson was to be a Nazirite and a deliverer for Israel. A Nazirite kept three promises: 1) He would not eat grapes or drink wine; 2) he would not touch anything dead; and 3) he would never cut his hair. The purpose of these three promises was to be completely set apart from culture—to be different in order to make a difference for God.

God's Spirit came over Samson and endowed him with supernatural strength for the purpose of delivering the nation. He is a fascinating character, one who has captured the imagination of Sunday School kids for centuries. I even named my first dog Samson.

But Samson was also a man of great weakness and foolishness.

Samson was born with incredible potential and expectations. He was a superstar in the making, and everything he needed was given to him. But Samson never lived up to the hype. Samson never engaged his purpose. He didn't deal with the wounds of his past. He kept too many secrets, refused to tame his temper, never learned to seek

God, and couldn't keep his pants on. So, his story doesn't end the way one might have expected. But out of the ashes of Samson's life, during the next six sessions, I'm praying that God will raise up hope, and from examining the story of a life well wasted, that you gain a renewed sense of God's purpose for your life. I pray you know how to be in the business of living that purpose out.

**YOUR STORY IS NOT YET FINISHED.
GOD CAN AND WILL USE YOU, NO
MATTER WHO YOU ARE OR WHAT
YOU'VE DONE.**

The fact remains: Your story is not yet finished. God can and will use you, no matter who you are or what you've done. Even if your story is rocky and dry. Even if you've fallen flat on your face. Even if you've managed to mess up relationship after relationship. Even if you stubbornly rebelled against God this very hour. Even if you feel like you have nowhere else to go, no one to whom you can turn, and no place that will accept you with the baggage you bring.

I believe God included stories in the Bible about people like Samson to encourage us to never lose hope. Think for a moment about all the warped people God used on the other side of failure:

- Noah hit the bottle too hard and acted like a fool before passing out. And this wasn't before the ark nor on the ark. This was after God had been good to him (Genesis 9:20-25).
- Abraham lied and said his wife was his sister (Genesis 12:10-20; 20:1-18).

- Jacob was a con artist who stole his brother's birth-right (Genesis 27:1-40).
- Moses killed a man with his bare hands (Exodus 2:11-12) and then delivered the Israelites from Egyptian slavery.
- Rahab welcomed the spies and saved her family. She is one of only five women mentioned in the lineage of Jesus Christ. But before that, she was a prostitute in the red light district of Jericho (Joshua 2).
- David, called a man after God's heart, had an adulterous affair with Bathsheba. He later wrote much of the Psalms as a result of his being restored by God (2 Samuel 11).
- Peter denied Jesus three times (Matthew 26:33-35). Later he became the Christ-appointed leader of the church.

**NOBODY WANTS "AVERAGE" OR
"NORMAL" OR "ORDINARY" OR
"FORGETTABLE" TO BE THE DEFINING
CHARACTERISTICS OF THEIR LIVES.**

The Bible is full of people who messed up, yet God still used them for His glory. I don't know today where you're at spiritually, and in what part of life you're wrestling. Maybe you've messed up, and you're trying to get back on your feet. Maybe you're still on your back. Maybe

you're fighting against a "normal" life, and your fear is that your funeral could be summed up with, "She was average." Nobody wants "average" or "normal" or "ordinary" or "forgettable" to be the defining characteristics of their lives. In fact, you don't have to do bad things to waste your life. Sometimes life is wasted on just being "normal."

Whether you feel like you've already wasted countless seasons, you feel like you're right in the middle of those wasted seasons, or you're seeking after a story that's extraordinary, God has something to say to you through the life of Samson.

Through his life, we'll see a life well wasted.

My prayer is that you'd not waste yours.

PAST REVISITED



Don't deal with your
daddy issues.

1



Samson was a God-appointed leader of the Israelites, set apart to protect and defend them from outside insurgents. Yet because he refused to adhere to the purposes God had laid before him, Samson ultimately wasted his life. In this session we'll take a look at the events leading up to Samson's birth and the family of origin issues that would later affect his decisions—decisions that eventually led to his demise. Samson's story serves as a word of caution for us all. We are ultimately responsible for whether or not our lives glorify God.

UNDERSTANDING ISRAEL'S PAST

In order to understand where we're going, we have to first grasp where we've been. Before we examine Samson's life, let's consider the context of the culture in which he was born. The Book of Judges picks up Israel's story where the Book of Joshua ends, almost 300 years prior to Samson's birth. Under Joshua, Moses' apprentice, the Israelites were obedient and faithful to God.

"Joshua sent the people away, and the Israelites went to take possession of the land, each to his own inheritance. The people worshiped the LORD throughout Joshua's lifetime and during the lifetimes of the elders who outlived Joshua. They had seen all the LORD's great works He had done for Israel. Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of 110" (Judges 2:6-8).

What stands out to you about Joshua's leadership from these verses?

After Joshua's death, the judges took over as Israel's divinely-appointed leadership. The period of judges extended from the death of Joshua (when Israel inhabited the promised land) until the era of Eli and Samuel (the beginning of monarchy). Two key factors controlled Israel's history during this period.

1. *The generation after Joshua's death didn't know God at all.*

The first factor was Israel's ongoing tendency to break the most important commandment in the Bible, as the people replaced their love for and worship of the Lord with the worship of their pagan neighbors' false gods. (After the incident with the golden calf, Moses warned the people to guard themselves against any covenants with the Canaanite people [Exodus 34:15-16]. They did not heed the warning.) This sin resulted in God punishing His people, most often through the use of invading armies:



Watch the *Samson* video for Session 1, available at threadsmedia.com/samson.



Samson is best known for his superhuman strength and his betrayal by Delilah.

"That whole generation was also gathered to their ancestors. After them another generation rose up who did not know the LORD or the works He had done for Israel. The Israelites did what was evil in the LORD's sight. They worshiped the Baals and abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They went after other gods from the surrounding peoples and bowed down to them. They infuriated the LORD, for they abandoned Him and worshiped Baal and the Ashtoreths. The LORD's anger burned against Israel, and He handed them over to marauders who raided them. He sold them to the enemies around them, and they could no longer resist their enemies. Whenever the Israelites went out, the LORD was against them and brought disaster on them, just as He had promised and sworn to them. So they suffered greatly" (Judges 2:10-15).

When have you seen sin lead to a downward spiral in the life of a person, family, or community?

The Israelites chasing after other gods has been called spiritual adultery. Describe a time when you were unfaithful to God. How did you restore the relationship?

2. The Israelites weren't protected from invasions.

Israel was one nation without a central government. They did not have a king, president, or other form of central leadership. Instead, the nation's key societal structures were tribes, clans, and families. The lack of central government meant the nation's citizens paid no taxes, yet it also meant they had no national army to respond to attacks or invasions from other groups or nations. Israel lacked a professional fighting force *and* a leader responsible for defending the nation. Thus, after God had sufficiently chastened His people (like in v. 15 above), He would raise up a temporary regional leader to carry out His judgments against the invaders:

"The LORD raised up judges, who saved them from the power of their marauders" (v. 16).

These divinely-appointed agents were the 12 judges, or governors, in the Book of Judges: Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah and Barak (two people counted as one judgeship), Gideon, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, and our person of interest, Samson. All the judges were instruments in the hands of God; He used them to deliver His people. They enforced the covenant (2:19), provided military leadership (3:10), and made judicial decisions (4:5). In short, the judges were military and civic leaders.¹



Baal was the supreme Canaanite god that was considered the source of both fertility and destruction.

With the death of Abdon, the second-to-last judge, the Israelites had further deviated from God's plan. For the seventh and final time in Judges, the writer recorded these words:

"The Israelites again did what was evil in the LORD's sight, so the LORD handed them over to the Philistines 40 years" (Judges 13:1).

The text doesn't mention that the Israelites cried out to God for deliverance while in the hands of the Philistines, yet He still appointed a new judge, a deliverer, chosen to once again spiritually refocus and physically protect Israel. Enter Samson, the first Israelite to lead God's people against the Philistines.

THE BIRTH OF SAMSON

Samson was a gift of God to an otherwise childless couple.

"There was a certain man from Zorah, from the family of Dan, whose name was Manoah; his wife was unable to conceive and had no children. The Angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, 'It is true that you are unable to conceive and have no children, but you will conceive and give birth to a son. Now please be careful not to drink wine or beer, or to eat anything unclean; for indeed, you will conceive and give birth to a son. You must never cut his hair, because the boy will be a Nazirite to God from birth, and he will begin to save Israel from the power of the Philistines.' Then the woman went and told her husband, 'A man of God came to me. He looked like the awe-inspiring Angel of God. I didn't ask Him where He came from, and He didn't tell me His name. He said to me, "You will conceive and give birth to a son. Therefore, do not drink wine or beer, and do not eat anything unclean, because the boy will be a Nazirite to God from birth until the day of his death"'" (Judges 13:2-7).

How did the Lord show He was planning to use Samson to accomplish His purposes?

Born during spiritual chaos and impending warfare, Samson's parents followed the angel's instructions and raised him as a Nazirite, a person under a vow to serve God in a special way—either for a limited purpose or for a lifelong commitment. In Samson's case, he was under a lifelong vow from birth.

Nazirites were to abstain from three actions: 1) consuming wine and other grape-related products, 2) cutting their hair, and 3) touching the deceased. (Numbers 6:1-21



The Book of Judges is the second of four books known as the Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings.



The circumstances surrounding Samson's birth are reminiscent of Sarah in Genesis 11:30, raising expectations of the birth of a child having great significance to God's plan.

further explains the intricacies of this vow.) These three restrictions—diet, appearance, and associations—served as a means for Samson to remain devoted to God. As we'll later find, despite Samson's Nazirite status, he struggled with a self-centered focus. It seems Samson's spiritual devotion was reduced to religious legalism: a list of "don'ts." He completely missed the whole point of the vow he was to keep: to be separated for a godly task, loving, and honoring Him above all. Let's explore some reasons for Samson's inability and/or unwillingness to follow God's instructions.

THE MANOAH AFFECT

First things first, I believe Samson's father, Manoah, was a spiritual man. Judges 13–14 reveals that Samson's dad was a decent, godly man with good intentions. In a day and time when no one honored the Lord and every man did what was right in his own eyes, here was a man and his wife who prayed and did their best to obey. But Manoah was not perfect. The Book of Judges reveals deficiencies in Manoah that negatively affected Samson. True, Manoah was not a bad man. God Himself trusted Manoah to raise up Samson. But Manoah made several key mistakes that I believe wounded his impressionable son.

Manoah failed to see God.

In simple terms, Manoah lacked faith. Samson was born into a long line of Israelites who failed to be obedient and faithful to God. This cycle of sin had a huge impact on the relationship between Manoah and his son Samson. Here we find a family trying to follow God in a messed up world. And obviously they aren't perfect.

"Manoah prayed to the LORD and said, 'Please Lord, let the man of God you sent come again to us and teach us what we should do for the boy who will be born.' God listened to Manoah, and the Angel of God came again to the woman. She was sitting in the field, and her husband Manoah was not with her. The woman ran quickly to her husband and told him, 'The man who came to me today has just come back!' So Manoah got up and followed his wife. When he came to the man, he asked, 'Are You the man who spoke to my wife?' 'I am,' He said. Then Manoah asked, 'When Your words come true, what will the boy's responsibilities and mission be?' The Angel of the LORD answered Manoah, 'Your wife needs to do everything I told her. She must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine or drink wine or beer. And she must not eat anything unclean. Your wife must do everything I have commanded her'" (Judges 13:8-14).

Here we find Manoah praying to God, which is clearly a good thing, and God answered. But even this second time, the angel didn't appear to Manoah, but to his wife. Perhaps Manoah couldn't believe what his wife had told him, so he asked for a repeat performance for confirmation. Or possibly he was jealous that the angel first appeared to his wife rather



John the Baptist (Luke 1:15-17) is another prominent example of someone under a lifelong Nazirite vow.



In order for the Israelites to satisfy the demands of the Lord, it was essential for every Israelite family to choose obedience to Him (Joshua 24:15).

than to him. It's significant to note that, at this point, nothing was required of Manoah, just of his wife. Manoah's responsibility and accountability would come later.

“Please stay here,’ Manoah told Him, ‘and we will prepare a young goat for You.’ The Angel of the LORD said to him, ‘If I stay, I won’t eat your food. But if you want to prepare a burnt offering, offer it to the LORD.’ For Manoah did not know He was the Angel of the LORD. Then Manoah said to Him, ‘What is Your name, so that we may honor You when Your words come true?’ ‘Why do you ask My name,’ the Angel of the LORD asked him, ‘since it is wonderful.’ Manoah took a young goat and a grain offering and offered them on a rock to the LORD, and He did a wonderful thing while Manoah and his wife were watching. When the flame went up from the altar to the sky, the Angel of the LORD went up in its flame. When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell facedown on the ground. The Angel of the LORD did not appear again to Manoah and his wife. Then Manoah realized that it was the Angel of the LORD. ‘We’re going to die,’ he said to his wife, ‘because we have seen God!’ But his wife said to him, ‘If the LORD had intended to kill us, He wouldn’t have accepted the burnt offering and the grain offering from us, and He would not have shown us all these things or spoken to us now like this.’ So the woman gave birth to a son and named him Samson. The boy grew, and the LORD blessed him. Then the Spirit of the LORD began to direct him in the Camp of Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol” (Judges 13:15-25).

Manoah offered the Angel of the LORD a meal, but the messenger told him to offer the lamb to God as a sacrifice. When Manoah made the sacrifice, the messenger worked wonders and then spectacularly ascended to heaven in a flame. Samson's parents finally realized this was an Angel of the LORD, and Manoah's first response was fear. It took his wife's prompting for Manoah to understand that God wouldn't kill the father of the person He was raising up to lead the Israelites.

God showed up, but Manoah missed it.

What did Manoah do that left him unprepared to hear from God?

What circumstances in your life distract you from God? What are some things you do (or don't do) that focus you for worship?



Samson's name, translated from Hebrew, means "bright as the sun" or "sun child."

How can you prepare yourself to hear from God minute-by-minute, hour-by-hour?

Manoah lacked spiritual leadership.

Just as Samson's father had faults, so likely did Manoah's. The lack of spiritual leadership was a big issue for the Israelites during the time of the judges. They lacked a positive central authority figure to show them the way they should go. And that's just like many of us. Sometimes we lack the godly guidance of a parental role model. A man who wasn't led well has a difficult time leading others well because he hasn't seen the example.

Samson was an only child born late in his parent's lives—a perfect recipe for the raising of a spoiled child. God's Spirit had begun stirring within Samson to prepare for battle with the Philistines, but instead of killing them, he fell in love with one.

"Samson went down to Timnah and saw a young Philistine woman there. He went back and told his father and his mother: 'I have seen a young Philistine woman in Timnah. Now get her for me as a wife'" (Judges 14:1-2).

Samson shouldn't have been going down to see the Philistines in the first place. The Philistines were enemies of both Israel and God. Samson had no self-control, presumably because he lacked parental discipline and authority. Scripture says Samson "told his father and mother." In other words, he chose to stand boldly opposed to his parents (and God) as he announced his intentions. He then commanded his parents to "get her," or "buy her" (a likely reference to her dowry).

Has there ever been a time in your life when you've wanted something that wasn't good for you? Did God allow you to have that? Why or why not?

Knowing what you know now, what would you tell the "younger you" before that decision?

For us guys, we typically aren't humble enough to admit when we don't know the right choice to make (Come on, we won't even stop and ask for directions!), and Samson was prototypical. But here, we get the sense that Samson is a spoiled only child, telling his parents what to do.



In 2012, a Samson mosaic was discovered during the excavation of a Byzantine-era synagogue in Galilee.

"But his father and mother said to him, 'Can't you find a young woman among your relatives or among any of our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines for a wife?' But Samson told his father, 'Get her for me, because I want her' Now his father and mother did not know this was from the LORD, who was seeking an occasion against the Philistines. At that time, the Philistines were ruling over Israel" (Judges 14:3-4).

Samson's parents objected to his demands: "You can't find a girlfriend among our people?" To be honest with you, that response bothers me. Parenting involves establishing clear boundaries for our children when they step out of line. Samson was clearly being ruled by what he saw—a fatal flaw that became a major character defect throughout his life—in part because his parents failed to confront him. Manoah should have said, "Samson, men of God are not ruled by their eyes, appetites, and desires, but by God's Word and God's purpose." Just as God punishes those He loves, so are parents to reprimand and guide their children:

"My son, do not take the Lord's discipline lightly or faint when you are reproved by Him, for the Lord disciplines the one He loves and punishes every son He receives" (Hebrews 12:5-6).

How can discipline actually be a form of mercy?

How could God's "no" actually be an example of His love for us? Can you think of times in your life where God said no to you? How did it turn out?

I don't know about you, but my parents wouldn't let me go certain places—dances, night-clubs, parties, that kind of stuff. Some may call it sheltered, but the truth is they were shielding me from the way they didn't want me to live my life.

What were some things you weren't allowed to do? places you couldn't go?

Do you ever wish your parents had told you no more often? How would that have saved you mistakes and heartaches?

Samson didn't know how to act when things didn't go his way. (This is a theme we'll see several more times throughout his life.) Forgetting His God-given gifts and responsibilities, Samson thought everything revolved around him. He saw his strength as a way to get what he wanted: women. Samson had no respect for authority in his life. He rejected his parents' opinions, and he brought them shame with his marriage to a Philistine woman. But more importantly, he didn't respect God's authority either. God's plan was clear, but Samson didn't seem to care.

One of the reasons we give a child rules and consequences is so that they know and respect God's rules and consequences. We may think we're doing our kids a favor by giving them everything they want, but it's not true. What they need—and what we needed—is godly leadership and guidance.

Samson, as we'll discover, never got past his past. He ended up wasting his life and wounding others in the process. Maybe you recognize that some of the negative behavior in your life, the problems you're facing right now, stem from deep-seated roots. Our parents shape our hearts, our minds, our character, and our lives.

There's no doubt that your father, mother, grandparent, or another person in your life growing up significantly marked you and shaped who you've become. Discovering the ways you've been shaped, both positively and negatively, may be the most important part of this study for you.

What was your relationship with your parents like? What are some qualities about your father and mother you admired? Avoided?

Besides your parents or grandparents, who else significantly invested in your life?

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM MANOAH

So, why pick on Manoah? Surely Samson's mother got plenty of things wrong. Likely she did, but my answer is simple: A father's spiritual depth and emotional involvement has a profound impact on his children. Scripture directly addresses fathers for the responsibility of rearing children. They are held accountable for this responsibility because a father's actions today directly impact his children's tomorrow. Manoah was responsible for giving Samson spiritual guidance. Yet how could Manoah truly have provided vision for his son if he didn't have it himself?



Listen to "Beauty in the Broken" by Hyland, "Not for a Moment (After All)" by Meredith Andrews, and "Losing" by Tenth Avenue North from the *Samson* playlist, available at threadsmedia.com/samson.

"If people can't see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves; But when they attend to what he reveals, they are most blessed" (Proverbs 29:18, MSG).

What was/is your father's vision for your life? Was it based on biblical guidance?

For better or worse, we become like our fathers. Sometimes it's for better: Our dads pass on positive virtues like honesty, integrity, a sense of humor, a good work ethic, a spiritual foundation, or devotion to family. But at other times it's for worse: Our father's flaws and weaknesses adversely impact us and they pass on some bad actions, attitudes, dispositions, or even character flaws. Sometimes these are called "daddy wounds." A counselor might call them "family of origin issues." These wounds usually describe some minor or major deficiencies in us that need to be addressed and healed. We often hear this brushed aside as, "I do [insert flaw here] because of the way I was raised," without taking personal responsibility of the issue at hand. Consider what research has shown about the positive developmental depth to which a father's presence and involvement affects his children.

- According to T. Berry Brazelton, pediatrician, author, and former clinical professor of Pediatrics Emeritus at Harvard Medical School, "a father's involvement with a child increases the child's IQ, the child's motivation to learn, and the child's self-confidence. In addition, children with involved dads are more likely to develop a sense of humor as well as an 'inner excitement.'"²
- At the 2008 First National Research Conference in Massachusetts, a soon-to-be postdoctoral research associate at Princeton University explained, "Children were indeed 'better off' the longer the biological father lived in the household. They found that an additional 5 years living with a biological father reduced the probability of outcomes such as smoking, drinking, convictions, marijuana use and pre-marital sexual activity."³
- Adolescents who strongly identified with their fathers were 80 percent less likely to have been in jail and 75 percent less likely to become unwed parents.⁴

Overall, when a father is present, active, and attached to his children, it's easy to see the positive influence on the lives of his family. However, just as in Manoah's case, fathers aren't perfect. Mistakes are made, and damage is done. Richard Innes, in the article "Healing a Man's Father Wound" says,

"Ask a hundred men how many felt close to and affirmed by their fathers and you will see about three or four hands raised. Herein lays the secret of so much



Effective fathers lead by demonstrating their devotion, discipline, and worship to their families.⁵

of our relational and emotional distress. The father-wound that injured our masculine soul is because we never felt close to or loved by our father. And that wound desperately needs to be healed. (The same principle also applies to women who carry a deep father-wound.)⁶

Author Mike Genung, in an article called “Healing Father Wounds,” describes three ways our fathers wound us.⁷ We can be wounded by . . .

1. Withdrawn, passive fathers

These are men who were physically present but “missing in action” emotionally. A father’s silence can be just as devastating as any kind of abuse; it leaves a child subconsciously or consciously wondering, *Doesn’t he care? Does he really love me? Am I worthy of being loved?*

Yes, a physical presence is essential to families. However, much more than taking residence is required. Fathers are biblically mandated to provide financial and emotional support, physical assistance and security, and leadership for their wives and children. They are called to be engaged in the inner workings of the family:

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her . . . husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own flesh but provides and cares for it” (Ephesians 5:25,28-29).

“Fathers, don’t stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

How would you describe the level of your father’s engagement to your family? How has that role changed as you’ve gotten older?

If you’re a parent (or want to be in the future) what words and actions display to your children that you’re engaged? What’s the antithesis of engagement?

2. Absent fathers

When a father leaves young children, the children are profoundly impacted. In spite of what a father may say or the time on the weekends he may spend with his kids, the roaring silence of Dad’s missing presence during the week, months, or years causes a child to think, *Surely he wouldn’t have left if he loved me. Maybe if I was good enough he’d still be around.*



“Kids spell love T-I-M-E.” —Dr. Ken Canfield, founder and president, National Center for Fathering⁸

A father's absence implies that the child wasn't worth the sacrifice, and that implication becomes imbedded into the thread of that child's being.

This is a growing trend in our world. It's been estimated that 85 percent of single parents are women. Just in the United States, approximately 24 million children (34 percent) live absent their biological fathers.⁹ Never before have we seen so many fathers not a part of their children's lives. This lack of involvement in a God-ordained role is reshaping and redefining the American family. According to the *Fragile Families Journal*:

"As rates of nonmarital childbirth have increased in the United States in the past half-century, a new family type, the fragile family, has emerged. Fragile families, which are formed as the result of a nonmarital birth, include cohabiting couples as well as noncohabiting, single mothers. Such families evoke public concern in part because they are more impoverished and endure more material hardship than married-parent families and have fewer sources of economic support."¹⁰

What short- and long-term effects do you see from so many children growing up without their fathers?

Children of absent fathers have a lot to overcome.

- They're two to three times more likely to be poor, abuse drugs and alcohol, experience physical, emotional, or educational neglect, and engage in criminal activity.¹¹
- Young fathers were also less likely to be living with their children if their own fathers had not lived in residence with them throughout childhood.¹²
- Women whose parents separated between birth and 6 years old experienced more than four times the risk of early sexual intercourse, and two and a half times higher risk of early pregnancy when compared to women in intact families.¹³
- 63 percent of youth suicides are from fatherless homes.¹⁴
- 90 percent of homeless and runaway children are without fathers.¹⁵
- 71 percent of high school dropouts come from fatherless homes.¹⁶

If your father was absent while growing up, how has that shaped your life?



If your earthly father doesn't measure up, trust in Him who heals wounds and will never let us down (Psalm 103:13; Romans 8:15; Hebrews 13:5).

What negative effects have you been able to identify from his absence?

If your father was present and engaged, what positive aspects of your life today can be attributed to your relationship with him?

3. Abusive fathers

For those who've been physically, psychologically, or even sexually abused by a parent, having a passive father would likely have been a blessing. The message of worthlessness has violently shaped them into a distorted truth of their childhood innocence. When the man or woman who should've communicated beauty, honor, respect, and strength twists that truth, the results can be disastrous. Receiving love and affection is almost impossible as hopelessness, despair, and rage set in. It's difficult—if not impossible—to receive love from someone else when the most important person in our lives indicated our severe lack of worth.

While abuse often goes unreported, here's what we do know:

- 1 in 10 kids in the United States were abused in 2010. In the same year, 1,560 children died from their injuries or neglect.
- Almost 80 percent (79.4 percent) of all child fatalities due to abuse were younger than 4 years old.
- 32.6 percent of child fatalities are attributed to neglect.
- 84.2 percent of perpetrators were the biological parent of the abused and/or neglected child.
- The average response time by authorities after suspected abuse is reported is 61 hours or 2.5 days.
- Victimization was split between the sexes, with boys accounting for 48.5 percent and girls accounting for 51.2 percent.¹⁷

Did you experience any of the above, whether directly or indirectly? At what age(s)? How has that marked you?



Leading a group? Find extra questions and teaching tools in the leader kit, available for purchase at threadsmedia.com/samson.

Kids wounded in any of these ways often seek attention, because in their minds any attention—even bad attention—is better than nothing. For example, little girls give themselves to boys at an early age, and some for the rest of their lives because they want to feel beautiful, wanted, and loved. Boys often exert their pent-up aggression by starting fights, looking to prove their manhood by beating somebody up.

As adults, some cover their wounds with work. The drive to be successful makes them feel like they matter. Some become codependent, while others can't stand the thought of being alone. Others turn to sports, sex—whether “real” or “virtual”—food, alcohol, or drugs, all trying to fill the void and numb the pain.

If you have deep wounds from your past, what have you used as an escape and/or to get attention?

Take a moment to pray, asking God to reveal to you ways in which you may have been wounded by your father, mother, or guardian. Ask God to heal you from your past and empower you to stop the cycle of hurt.

HOW DO YOU GET OVER A DADDY WOUND?

If you've found that you carry wounds from your past that need healing, here are some ways that you can begin to move forward.

1. Own that you have issues.

Investigate and see what negative qualities, habits, or hang-ups you got from your parents. See where your wound may show itself: alcohol and/or drug abuse, anger issues, passive aggressive behavior when things don't go your way, an inability to admit you are wrong, wallowing in past failures, a tendency toward pride, passivity, or control, and so forth.

“If we say, ‘We have no sin,’ we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).

2. Take responsibility for your own actions.

Each of us is responsible for our own sins and behavior. We may be wounded by a problem past, but our present decisions aren't the fault of our fathers. We need to stop blaming our present problems on our past pain.



One of the best ways to heal from your own wounds is to help others. If you're not a parent, sign up to be a Big Brother or Big Sister at bbbs.org. The next generation needs caring, committed people to stand in the gap.

Instead of casting blame, maybe, just maybe, God could be up to something bigger. Even when people have sinned against us, God can shape us and use the most horrific sins to write a beautiful story.

"Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. He comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For as the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so through Christ our comfort also overflows. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation. If we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is experienced in your endurance of the same sufferings that we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that as you share in the sufferings, so you will share in the comfort" (2 Corinthians 1:3-7).

"Fathers are not to be put to death for their children or children for their fathers; each person will be put to death for his own sin" (Deuteronomy 24:16).

3. Claim the forgiveness and power of God to change you in Christ.

If God has forgiven you, you're a new creation with renewed hope and a boatload of grace and mercy—more than you could ever exhaust. And with the same power that raised Christ from the dead, you're given the freedom to live a new life:

"You took off your former way of life, the old self that is corrupted by deceitful desires; you are being renewed in the spirit of your minds; you put on the new self, the one created according to God's likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth" (Ephesians 4:22-24).

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

4. Find your value and meaning in Christ.

The question of whether or not you matter has already been answered. The place where you find love, rest, and peace is in Jesus. Replace the lies perpetrated by your earthly father with the truth of your Heavenly Father. God gave His Son so that you could be adopted into His family. He loves you that much.

"Look at how great a love the Father has given us that we should be called God's children. And we are!" (1 John 3:1a).



John 14:1-4 explains that by believing in Christ we are empowered to become children of God, members of His household, and have relationship with the Father.

5. *Forgive the person who wronged you.*

When we hold onto bitterness, resentment, and hatred, we allow our pasts to dictate our future, and we offer the enemy a perfect platform to exercise dominion in our lives.

There are no perfect fathers. So let your dad go. Even if your father is deceased, write him a letter explaining your hurt. Forgive him in Jesus' name. Say, "I bless you, pray for you, and want to have a healthy relationship with you if at all possible." Then regardless of his response, let it go.

"And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ" (Ephesians 4:32).

Which of the above verses most resonates with where you find yourself right now?

What is most difficult about forgiving someone who has hurt you deeply?

The sad and twisted part of parental wounds is not only that our lives are affected, but that we often repeat the pattern as we transition to parenthood.

STOP THE CYCLE OF DYSFUNCTION

One of the saddest verses in the Bible is found just prior to the story of Samson:

"That whole generation was also gathered to their ancestors. After them another generation rose up who did not know the LORD or the works He had done for Israel" (Judges 2:10).

It's possible for a generation to completely lose sight of God—His power, His grace, His love, and His forgiveness. But it's also possible for that trend to be reversed. And it starts with you! If you're currently a parent or ever plan to be, let's discuss some ways you can become an effective spiritual leader in your own household:

1. Let your family see you read the Bible. Let them hear you pray. Let them see you live with integrity and consistency. Let them go with you when you minister to someone in need. Let them catch you doing the right thing, especially in difficult or frustrating situations.

2. Consistently discipline in your home (Ephesians 6:4). Here's a truth you know: Doing bad things in life brings pain. That doesn't mean you beat your kids. In fact, it's quite



Resources for further study: *Wild at Heart* by John Eldredge, *Breaking Free* by Beth Moore, and *The Parent Adventure* by Rodney and Selma Wilson

the opposite. You spare the rod and spoil the child for sure. But that's only one side of discipline. The real power is not in bringing pain when they do bad but in bringing blessing when they do good. Love your kids. Brag on their good behavior. Laugh with them. Catch them doing the right things, and praise them for it.

3. Tell your kids you're sorry. When you mess up, don't cover it up. Be honest, and ask for forgiveness. Show them how to act when they do things they're not proud of.

4. Bless your child. Gary Smalley and John Trent in their book, *The Blessing*, say that there are five things children need from their dads: "meaningful touch" (to be hugged and touched in a non-sexual and non-violent way); "spoken words" (to tell them you love them and are proud of them); "expressing high value" (telling them they matter, they're special, and they have great qualities); "picturing a special future" (ensuring they know that they are filled with potential, possessing unique gifts and capabilities that God is going to use one day to bless others); and "an active commitment" (repeating these four things consistently and often).¹⁸

Parents: What can you do now to begin making these traits a reality in your home?

Non-parents: What step(s) can you take right now to a) be ready if God blesses you with children? b) help other parents in their God-given role? How can you personally help care for the next generation of kids?

APPLY TO LIFE

> **CONNECT:** Approach someone you know and trust well. Buy that person a cup of coffee and ask if you can share and talk through some wounds you've received from your parents. If you haven't yet identified these wounds, ask your friend to help you see what you can't see.

> **STUDY:** Begin this week to study Samson's failures. In this lesson, we explored Samson's family of origin that led him down a dangerous path. Write down (below) the times when Samson messed up. Do you see a pattern? What was the root of Samson's sin?

> **LISTEN:** Purchase "Beauty in the Broken" by Hyland, "Not for a Moment (After All)" by Meredith Andrews, and "Losing" by Tenth Avenue North (see the playlist at threadsmedia.com/samson). Add these to your regular mix of music throughout the week so that you'll be reminded to continue thinking about God's ability to heal our pasts.
