The Humiliation of the Proud

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: God can use even the disobedience and pride of His people for His purposes.

MAIN PASSAGES: Judges 14:1-3,8-9; 16:4-5,16-17,21-22,26-30

What funny, humiliating, or embarrassing thing has happened to you?

All of us have experienced something we wish we could have avoided. While there are some humiliating moments we couldn’t have stopped, there are others we could have dodged but for whatever reason we did not. When our pride flares and we deviate from God’s commands, we dive headlong into trouble. Humility will arrive one way or another, sooner or later. Know that God opposes the proud, but know that He also gives grace to the humble (Jas. 4:6). Rightly understood, humiliation under the care of God is a gift of grace.
Point 1: Impulsiveness leads to living carelessly (Judg. 14:1-3,8-9).

1 Samson went down to Timnah and saw a young Philistine woman there. 2 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.”

3 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. She’s the right one for me.”

From birth, Samson had been dedicated to God as a Nazirite. He wasn’t to drink wine or beer, cut his hair, or touch dead bodies, but more than that, he was to have a heightened sense of God’s word and God’s mission to spread God’s glory. Samson’s impulses, however, led him to be careless about what God wanted. Everyone else—his parents, this Philistine woman, and even God—took a backseat to his selfish desires.

**Sin as Selfishness:** When we sin, we are acting out of a selfish ______________ and ______________ that assumes our action will lead us to more ______________ than if we were to obey God.

8 After some time, when he returned to marry her, he left the road to see the lion’s carcass, and there was a swarm of bees with honey in the carcass. 9 He scooped some honey into his hands and ate it as he went along. When he came to his father and mother, he gave some to them and they ate it. But he did not tell them that he had scooped the honey from the lion’s carcass.

By the power of God’s Spirit, Samson had killed a lion with his bare hands while on the way to make his wedding arrangements with the Philistine woman. Later he found honey in the lion’s carcass, so he scooped some to eat and gave some to his parents too. The problem? Touching a dead animal, including eating out of one, violated Samson’s Nazirite vow, and it also defiled his parents without their knowledge or consent. Samson’s impulsiveness ruled his life, and his careless living affected those around him.

Why is impulsive, careless living contrary to God’s way?
Point 2: Pride leads to behaving irresponsibly (Judg. 16:4-5,16-17).

In time, Samson found a new love interest, Delilah, and the Philistines bribed her to discover the secret of Samson’s strength. Three times Delilah asked, and three times Samson lied about the source of his strength, not out of concern but seemingly out of pride and play. Delilah persisted and eventually Samson told her. His pride spoke so loudly that he could not hear the warning siren preceding his fall (Prov. 16:18).

Why does pride lead to a fall?

Delilah, with her nagging, wore down a man with God’s great strength. Why? Because Samson’s great idols in his life were his own comfort and pleasure. He compromised over and over again merely to be comfortable and to satisfy his whims. If we turn personal comfort into a current version of heaven, then discomfort becomes our hell and we will do whatever we can to get out of it. But if knowing God is heaven, then no amount of discomfort will lead us to compromise our faith in Christ. Why? Because we know in whom we have believed—Jesus Christ, who endured the cross for the joy set before Him (Heb. 12:2-3). If pride leads to compromise, then humble dependence on the risen Christ will lead to a faithful commitment to Him and His glory.

What does humble dependence upon Jesus look like?

Voices from Church History

“All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves.”

—Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)
21 The Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes. They brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles, and he was forced to grind grain in the prison. 22 But his hair began to grow back after it had been shaved.

26 Samson said to the young man who was leading him by the hand, “Lead me where I can feel the pillars supporting the temple, so I can lean against them.” 27 The temple was full of men and women; all the leaders of the Philistines were there, and about three thousand men and women were on the roof watching Samson entertain them. 28 He called out to the LORD: “Lord God, please remember me. Strengthen me, God, just once more. With one act of vengeance, let me pay back the Philistines for my two eyes.” 29 Samson took hold of the two middle pillars supporting the temple and leaned against them, one on his right hand and the other on his left. 30 Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines.” He pushed with all his might, and the temple fell on the leaders and all the people in it. And those he killed at his death were more than those he had killed in his life.

Samson found himself stuck in chains because of his pride, utterly humiliated. He was now a slave-labor sideshow for the entertainment of the Philistines. But Samson’s hair was growing back, and more importantly, he was coming to his senses. In this moment of brokenness, he recognized he was stuck and powerless to do anything about it. So he did what he should have done all along—he called out to God for help.

How quickly do you turn to God when you struggle with temptation and sin?

Slow    Quick    Immediately

Samson’s humiliation brought with it a friend: clarity. He understood that if God were with him, he couldn’t fail. So he humbled himself and asked God to give him strength to defeat his enemies, to accomplish the mission he was given before his birth. His prayer was late and unpolished, but God heard Samson’s cry and answered him. God gave Samson power and he crushed his enemies, even as he died like one of them.

What promises of God do you cling to in troubling times?
My Mission

Because we have experienced victory over sin through Christ’s humility and sacrifice, we live in humility before others as we call them to put away their sins and turn to God for deliverance.

- In what ways will you humble yourself in light of the destructive nature of pride?
- How can your group work together to address areas of sin and pride in your community with the love of Jesus and the good news of the gospel?
- How will you follow the humble example of Jesus as you share the power of the gospel with Samson-like people in your life this week?

Notes
Day 1: Read Judges 13:1-25

Samson’s story began like so many others in the Bible, with a woman who was unable to conceive and had no children. But also like so many of these other stories, that would not continue to be the case. One day the angel of the Lord appeared to this woman and told her that she would have a son. Then, unlike many of these kinds of stories in Scripture, the angel of the Lord went further and gave specific instructions for how the boy was to be raised, even while he was still in the womb: no wine or beer, nothing unclean to eat, and no haircuts. He would be a Nazirite from birth.

The woman reported all that she had been told to her husband, Manoah, who then prayed. But his prayer was not what many of us would have expected. He did not thank God for this promised gift, nor did he ask God for strength and wisdom to obey. Instead, he asked God to send the man of God back once more to teach them what they should do for the boy to be born. In other words, Manoah prayed for the very thing his wife had just been given.

If we are honest, we have to admit that there is some of Manoah in each of us. We too are prone to ask God for the very things He has already given. Perhaps it is because we doubt Him and want confirmation. Perhaps it is because we secretly hope He will give us a different answer the second time. Or perhaps it is because we just don’t listen well. Whatever the reason or reasons, we can do the same. And this is why we need to pay attention to how God responded to Manoah. He sent the angel of the Lord back again! Let us never fail to remember that God is a patient God, full of grace and mercy for His people.

Voices from Church History

“Let us no longer live in this world as we have been; in fact, let us no longer live to ourselves but let Christ live in us. When he has been restored to the honor of the head, the house of the devil will fall, and all our enemies will die with our sins in eternal destruction.”

—Caesarius of Arles (c. 470-543)

What have you asked God for repeatedly, even after He answered you? Why?
Day 2: Read Judges 14:1-20

The ending of Judges 13 is one that gives readers unfamiliar with this account great hope and excitement. The boy who had been promised to save Israel from the power of the Philistines was born, grew, and the Lord blessed him, and now his heart was being stirred up by the Spirit of the Lord. So as we turn to chapter 14, we might expect Samson to gather an army and square off against Israel’s enemy.

But that is not what we see as Judges 14 opens. Instead of pursuing the Philistines, Samson pursued a Philistine—a single woman that he saw and wanted to take as his wife. Samson was stirred, but instead of acting on behalf of his people—or better yet, God—he acted on his own behalf for his own selfish gain. We know that in the mysterious ways of God, Samson’s selfishness would serve God’s own purposes. Samson’s selfish pursuit led to the Philistines being overthrown later on. But we cannot miss the warning: It is far too easy for us to live selfishly rather than selflessly, even when God is at work within us. We can never take for granted our desperate need for Christ to captivate our hearts and prompt actions that bring Him, and Him alone, glory.

When have you found yourself intending to seek God’s glory only to end up pursuing your own?

Day 3: Read Judges 15:1-20

As you read through the story of Samson, you might miss something that is quite profound. Samson does pretty much everything on his own. Unlike the other judges before him, Samson does not form an army or partner with anyone else—aside from partnering with three hundred foxes.

Seeing this affirms Samson’s greatest weakness: pride. It seems that the mighty Samson believed he didn’t need anyone else. He could take care of things himself.

But as part of the church, the bride of Christ, let us be quick to see the folly of Samson’s solitary lifestyle. We know that God did not create us for isolation but rather for integration. We are to live fully integrated with others, relying on their strengths where we are weak and lending them our strength where they are weak. This is what Samson missed: his strength was limited. He had weaknesses and was in need of others. May we be a humble people who do not share in his mistake.

How might you be prone to drift toward isolation at times? Why?
Day 4: Read Judges 16:1-20

The old adage goes “Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me.” We can only wonder who gets the shame for being fooled three times as Delilah had been. Three times she asked Samson the secret of his strength and each time he had lied to her.

Samson may even have been teasing Delilah for his own enjoyment. If so, Samson was playing with fire, telling us even more about his character. Before this we are told that Samson loved Delilah. That detail is not mentioned in his first marriage, or in the account of his pursuing a prostitute just before this. Samson loved Delilah, and yet, he still put his own desires above hers. Samson provides us with a wonderful example of a terrible husband.

Later on though, we encounter a different Husband in Scripture, One who put His bride’s needs before His own. A Husband who laid down His life for His bride. A perfect Husband who is in the process of perfecting His bride for her good and His Father’s glory. A perfect Husband in Jesus Christ.

How can you sacrifice your own desires, and perhaps even your own needs, for someone else this week?

Day 5: Read Judges 16:21-31

There was the once-mighty Samson, chained up and blind, having had his eyes gouged out. If you have ever lost your eyesight or perhaps lost a pair of glasses, you know how humbling it is not to be able to see. It can leave you feeling helpless, vulnerable. Surely Samson felt helpless in that moment, leading to his awareness of his need of God.

What had gotten Samson into trouble so many times before this? That’s right—his eyes. His eyes had been the source of his stumbling through life for so long. He had looked at a woman and wanted her to be his wife, no matter that she was a Philistine. He had looked at honey and wanted to eat it, no matter that it was in a lion’s carcass and unclean. Here, as his life came to a close, God was kind to remove the very thing that had caused Samson to stumble so many times before this. The Philistines removed Samson’s eyes out of spite; God removed them out of love.

How has God taken something from you, even if it was painful, only to find out it was for your good?
Encourage One Another

Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

• Impulsiveness leads to living carelessly (Judg. 14:1-3,8-9).
• Pride leads to behaving irresponsibly (Judg. 16:4-5,16-17).
• Humiliation leads to relying on God (Judg. 16:21-22,26-30).

How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?

What steps can your group take to show love for one another and point out potential areas where pride may be creeping into your lives?

What events in your life have you found to be the most humbling? How have these events opened your eyes to the spiritual blindness of those in need of Jesus?

Notes
UNIT 7
SESSION 1
1. Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2009) [eBook].

SESSION 2

SESSION 3

SESSION 4

UNIT 8
SESSION 1
1. Noel Piper, *Treasuring God in our Traditions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 64.

SESSION 2

SESSION 3

EASTER SESSION

UNIT 9
SESSION 1

SESSION 2

SESSION 3

SESSION 4

SESSION 5
Tr evin Wax
General Editor—The Gospel Project
Author of multiple books, including This Is Our Time: Everyday Myths in Light of the Gospel

In these sessions of The Gospel Project, we experience some of the most exciting narratives in Scripture. There are accounts here of sin and judgment, of moral decline and merciful intervention, and of rescuers who need rescue. Through it all, one thing is clear: God is with His people and He is faithful to His promise.

It’s important to keep that central theme in mind because many people read these stories about the conquest of the land and try to find examples for emulation. To be clear, we can learn a lot from these Old Testament heroes (see 1 Cor. 10), but we cannot implement their virtues apart from our connection to the Vine—Jesus Christ Himself, the One who bears fruit in us and through us.

As we walk through our present wilderness, struggling against sin and encountering sorrow, we know that the God who has gone before us is faithful. He is the One who prepares the way for us to be His ambassadors. He is the One who breaks the chains of our idolatry and lifts our gaze to His unchanging glory.