Unit 9, Session 4
The Humiliation of the Proud

Summary and Goal
In the previous sessions, we saw how God uses unexpected people and circumstances to accomplish His purposes. But how does God work with those who seem to have their lives put together: the successful, strong, and spiritual? In this session, we will look to Samson, a man who appeared to be able to succeed on his own by relying on his own cleverness and strength. We will see that while he seemed to have all the puzzle pieces of his life in the right arrangement, he forgot whose image he was supposed to follow. We will also see that often we aren’t much different. Our strong personalities and abilities to muscle through life lead us to forget on whom we depend. As with Samson, God humbles the proud, and that is a gift of grace.

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

Session in a Sentence
God can use even the disobedience and pride of His people for His purposes.

Christ Connection
Samson’s downfall was the result of his own pride and disobedience, and yet, God used his death to begin the deliverance of His people. Jesus’ death was the result of His perfect obedience to pay for our disobedience. God used Christ’s death to bring deliverance “once for all” for His people.

Missional Application
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.
Group Time

Introduction

SAY: Can you think of a more cringe-inducing show than *America’s Funniest Home Videos*? After decades of being on air, initially calling for VHS-tape submissions, they never seem to run out of humiliating, gut-wrenching, and hilarious videos. Some of the best montages are the embarrassing moments at weddings. Whether it’s people dancing who shouldn’t be, members of the bridal party passing out in the ceremony, or desperate ladies diving for the bouquet toss, there’s plenty of humiliation to spread around.

INTERACT: Ask the group the opening question on page 112 in the DDG.

What funny, humiliating, or embarrassing thing has happened to you? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

READ the following paragraph from the DDG (p. 112).

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.

SUMMARIZE: In this session, we will look to Samson, a man who appeared to be able to succeed on his own by relying on his own cleverness and strength. We will see that while he seemed to have all the puzzle pieces of his life in the right arrangement, he forgot whose image he was supposed to follow. We will also see that often we aren’t much different. Our strong personalities and abilities to muscle through life lead us to forget on whom we depend. As with Samson, God humbles the proud, and that is a gift of grace.

For additional teaching options and other resources, please visit www.GospelProject.com/additional-resources.
Point 1: Impulsiveness leads to living carelessly (Judg. 14:1-3,8-9).

PACK ITEM 12: THE JUDGES HANDOUT: Recall this handout to help you make the following point: By the time we reach Judges 14, God had provided the Israelites with a number of judges to rescue them from the affliction of their enemies. Many of the judges didn't look the part, but then came along Samson. It seemed God had finally given the Israelites the leader they truly needed. It wouldn’t take long, however, to realize that this man was strong on the outside but quite weak on the inside.

READ Judges 14:1-3 (DDG p. 113).

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.”

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 113) to point out Samson’s focus on his selfish desires instead of God’s word and mission.

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.

• It didn’t matter to Samson that God prohibited inter-faith marriages with the peoples surrounding them in the promised land (Ex. 34:15-16); nor did it matter to him that God’s plan for him from before his conception and birth was to save his people from the Philistines (Judg. 13:5). He wanted this Philistine woman he saw, and nothing else mattered. His parents tried to discourage him from following his impulses, but they failed. In his own eyes, she was the right one for him to marry.

Commentary: “The Hebrew term [for Nazirite] means consecration, devotion, and separation. Two traditional forms of the Nazirite are found. One was based on a vow by the individual for a specific period; the other was a lifelong devotion following the revelatory experience of a parent that announced the impending birth of a child. The Nazirite’s outward signs—the growth of hair, abstention from wine and other alcoholic products, the avoidance of contact with the dead—are illustrative of devotion to God. Violation of these signs resulted in defilement and the need for purification so the vow could be completed. Numbers 6:1-21 regulated the practice.”

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

Essential Doctrine “Sin as Selfishness”: When we sin, we are acting out of a selfish attitude and mind-set that assumes our action will lead us to more happiness than if we were to obey God. Because sin is manifested in our tendency to be “curved inward” toward self, it is the opposite of love. Love looks outwardly to place others before oneself, operating from the mind-set that others are more important (Phil. 2:3). Where sin selfishly seeks personal gratification and happiness, love works for the joy of others in the hopes of making others happy in God.

READ Judges 14:8-9 (DDG p. 113).

*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. 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.*

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 113) to explain this second example of Samson’s impulsive living.

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.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

Why is impulsive, careless living contrary to God’s way? (impulsive living reflects our selfish hearts rather than obedience to the commands of God; as sinners, our natural, impulsive instinct in life is to sin and do what is right in our own eyes, not God’s; impulsive living takes advantage of and hurts others in one’s quest to fulfill his or her own desires)
Point 2: Pride leads to behaving irresponsibly (Judg. 16:4-5, 16-17).

SAY: Samson’s marriage didn’t go as he had planned, but it was part of God’s plan to force a confrontation between His judge, Samson, and the people His judge was supposed to fight, the Philistines (14:4). Though Samson’s motives were impulsive, careless, and selfish toward his wife and in his retaliation against the Philistines, the Lord was with him and strengthened him to fight the people’s oppressors (14:19; 15:14).

READ: Ask a volunteer to read Judges 16:4-5, 16-17 (DDG p. 114).

4 Some time later, he fell in love with a woman named Delilah, who lived in the Sorek Valley. 5 The Philistine leaders went to her and said, “Persuade him to tell you where his great strength comes from, so we can overpower him, tie him up, and make him helpless. Each of us will then give you 1,100 pieces of silver.”

16 Because she nagged him day after day and pleaded with him until she wore him out, 17 he told her the whole truth and said to her, “My hair has never been cut, because I am a Nazirite to God from birth. If I am shaved, my strength will leave me, and I will become weak and be like any other man.”

EXPLAIN: Reference the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 114) as you fill in the gaps in the story regarding Delilah and her nagging Samson for the secret of his strength. Highlight his pride on display in this episode, and then comment on how we are prone to suffer from our own pride.

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).

- Because Samson had despised God’s commands, ignored the pleas of his parents, chased his lusts, and lived like his enemies, his life was about to fall apart. The woman he loved would sell him out, literally. She herself would have his hair cut and then call the Philistines so He would be captured, mocked, and mauled. Samson’s strength may have been out-muscled only by his pride. He finally met his match in his irresponsible pursuit of sin, and the Lord left him (Judg. 16:20).

- Pride puts us in problematic scenarios, and left unchecked, it only gets worse. We neglect God’s Word and then wonder why our souls feel malnourished. Many husbands and wives fail to recognize the threat and danger of adultery that could come from spending time with a member of the opposite sex. Many allow their egos and selfish desires to make success, material wealth, or comfort their god, causing them to work to the detriment of their families. Like Samson, we can run full steam ahead in pride only to crash and burn.
INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

**Why does pride lead to a fall?** (God opposes the proud and will humble them all one day; pride leads people to think they are above others, above the rules, above the potential consequences of pride-filled actions; pride puts people in situations they think they can handle but they cannot)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 114) to highlight Samson’s idols of comfort and pleasure and to compare his responses to discomfort with Jesus Christ’s response on the cross.

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.

- **Samson’s Response to Discomfort:** “Eat honey out of a dead carcass? No problem, I’m hungry.” “Marry a woman I’m not supposed to? As long as she looks good to me.” “Tell Delilah my hair is tied to my strength? Who cares, she’s exhausting—I just want to be comfortable.”

- **Jesus’ Response to Discomfort:** The excruciating discomfort Jesus experienced as He was crucified, along with the added temptations from the crowd and those being crucified next to Him to seek His comfort and get Himself off of the cross were not enough for Him to compromise His calling. He looked past them to the joy that would result from His obedience: the Father’s pleasure and our salvation.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

**What does humble dependence upon Jesus look like?** (finding joy in doing what is right and pleasing to God; praying for strength to resist temptation; faithful obedience in the face of discomfort and opposition)
Point 3: Humiliation leads to relying on God (Judg. 16:21-22,26-30).

READ Judges 16:21-22,26-30 (DDG p. 115).

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.

EXPLAIN: Use the following illustration and the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 115) to depict Samson’s desperate situation and the only recourse he had for a hopeful outcome—calling out to God for help. Apply this to your group so they see the importance of recognizing that we are helpless in our sin and in need of God before we even get stuck in its consequences.

Illustration: Imagine a downpour of rain coming out of nowhere leaving your four-door sedan stuck in the mud. You try pushing; no help. You try putting boards underneath the tires, but the only thing that happens is mud gets kicked up behind the car as it sinks deeper and deeper into the wet earth. Finally, you humble yourself and call in a professional. It’s tow-truck time. There may be other sedans all around you, and ropes and chains are not hard to come by. But you know these won’t work; they lack the power to pull your vehicle out of the mud. If you tried with a comparable vehicle, you likely would have two cars to be pulled out. No, you need something stronger. You need a vehicle that was made for times like this—a tow-truck with the power and equipment to pull your car out of its muddy trap.

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.
Application: It’s easy for us to criticize Samson; surely he deserves it. However, we need to be careful to recognize that we often work the same way, if not to the same degree. We allow our pride to lead us into the ditches of life. We get stuck in situations that we cannot wiggle out of on our own. Here we can learn from Samson. When we are stuck in our sin, instead of exhausting all other options, all of our ways, ideas, and strategies, and then turning to God, we need to turn to Him first. We should turn to God immediately and watch how He works. In fact, we should turn to Him before we get stuck. There is no need to wait until we feel helpless—we already are helpless on our own.

INSTRUCT: Ask group members to use the scale in their DDG (p. 115) to consider how quickly they turn to God when they struggle with temptation and sin, whether for strength or forgiveness.

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

Last Resort  Slow  Quick  Immediately

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 115) to highlight Samson’s insight that his strength had always come from God and he could still fulfill his mission to defeat the Philistines with God’s help. Then ask group members if they see any parallels between Samson and Jesus. Help to make this connection with the Leader Guide content below.

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.

- Both Samson and Jesus gave their lives for their mission: Samson in a last effort to kill some of his enemies, the Philistines; Jesus to deal the deathblow to the enemies of sin and death.
- Both Samson and Jesus achieved victory through their humiliation: Samson as a laughingstock to the Philistines; Jesus suffered on the cross for all to see.
- Samson died along with the Philistines in vengeance; Jesus died as a substitute in the place of sinners to redeem them from their sin, and then He rose again from the dead.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

What promises of God do you cling to in troubling times? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)
EXPLAIN: God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble, and He has no issue humbling the proud as part of the process of His grace. Samson went from physical strength and spiritual weakness to physical weakness and spiritual strength. This is the track and trajectory of the gospel. Christ humbled Himself to save the proud—us. We are saved not by flexing our muscles of morality but by exercising faith alone in the risen Christ alone. Since the grace of God humbles us, when we interact with Samson-types at the office, down the street, or even on Sunday morning, we don’t have to puff up our chests. Like us, they are in need of hearing about the One who didn’t exploit His power but humbled Himself to the point of death on a cross. Every Samson-like person you meet needs a Savior—the Savior. It may appear as if their life is great, but success and charisma don’t last beyond this life. Instead, let us humbly point others to the One who gives eternal life to all who humble themselves.

READ the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 116), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God’s Word.

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?

CLOSE IN PRAYER: Father, left to ourselves we are a sinful and prideful people. Yet not even our sin can thwart Your plan and purposes. Thank You for sending Your Son, who in humility died for our pride and rebellion, and for sending Your Spirit to draw us away from our selfish ambitions through repentance and faith. Help us to preach the gospel to fellow prideful people who need to look away from themselves and to Your powerful and humbling grace to us in Jesus. Amen.

INSTRUCT: As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the Daily Study devotions in their DDG (pp. 117-119), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use Encourage One Another (p. 120) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God’s Word.
Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage your group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The Daily Study devotions in the DDG (pp. 117-119) will help group members get into God’s Word and study it for themselves. Encourage One Another (p. 120) will help group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

Daily Study

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 117-119) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

- Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.

- Share the following idea from the devotion for Day 5 as a part of point 3 in the session: As Samson’s 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.

Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God’s Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

- Day 2: “It is far too easy for us to live selfishly rather than selflessly, even when God is at work within us.”
- Day 3: “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.”

Visit www.GospelProject.com/Blog for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God’s Word.

Encourage One Another

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the group member’s DDG (p. 120) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using The Gospel Project in their groups.

- Encourage group members to point out instances of humility they have seen in one another as well as areas where each of them can grow in humility.

- See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.
Additional Commentary

**Point 1: Impulsiveness leads to living carelessly** *(Judg. 14:1-3, 8-9).*

“Samson’s parents asked him in vain if there were no women among his relatives whom he could marry. Intermarriage with the Philistines was a denial of Samson’s calling as a Nazirite, and his choice of a bride contrasts strongly with the ‘ideal’ wife of Othniel, the first judge, who married Caleb’s daughter. Samson said of the woman he ‘saw’ (v. 1), *she’s the right one for me*, literally, ‘she is right in my eyes.’ In this he represented Israel, where each citizen ‘did whatever seemed right to him’ (17:6; 21:25), literally, ‘did what was right in his eyes.’ Yet the Lord would use even Samson’s sinful desires to accomplish his purposes. The text literally says his father and mother did not know that she was from the Lord. This Philistine woman would be the means God would use to stir up Samson to begin a conflict with the Philistines, who were ruling Israel at this time. Again, the absence of any mention of Israel crying out to the Lord is striking.”

“Empowered by the Spirit of Yahweh, Samson had passed the physical test posed by the lion. For a person who operates by his senses, these bees and their honey will test his spiritual mettle. Will he be true to his Nazirite calling and leave the honey alone? The answer is not long in coming—Samson scrapes some of the honey out of the cavity in the corpse with his hands and nonchalantly eats it as he resumes his walk to Timnah. Like the Timnite woman in verse 1, the test has become a trap. In fact, Samson’s response to this test is triply sinful. First, since contact with a corpse renders any object unclean, as an ordinary Israelite Samson should have left the honey alone (cf. Lev. 11:24-25, 39). Second, contact with a cadaver is particularly defiling for a Nazirite (Num. 6:6). Third, Samson callously implicates his parents in the defilement, offering them some of the honey without telling them that he had scraped it out of the corpse of a lion. Samson’s perversity knows no bounds. His parents had sanctified him, but now he desecrates them. Unaware of his defilement, Samson’s father continues the journey down to Timnah, presumably to finalize the wedding arrangements and to settle the business side of this ‘arranged’ marriage.”

**Point 2: Pride leads to behaving irresponsibly** *(Judg. 16:4-5, 16-17).*

“Women were Samson’s problem all along, yet his encounter with Delilah is the only case where love is mentioned. Once again, his heart was set on a Philistine woman. Delilah’s name sounds like the Hebrew word for ‘night,’ in keeping with the darkness that was about to descend on Samson. The Philistine leaders, the rulers of the five city-states that made up that region (1 Sam. 6:17-18), sought to persuade Delilah to determine the secret of Samson’s strength by promising her 1,100 pieces of silver from each leader. In comparison, the price of an ordinary slave was thirty pieces of silver (Ex. 21:32).”
“Samson took a break, but did not permanently stop his escapades. Soon he turned up at the house of Delilah, whose name means ‘a devotee’ (16:4). Her name is Semitic, but as the story unfolds her nationality is revealed as undoubtedly Philistine. Some commentators have suggested that she could have been of mixed blood: half Philistine and half Israelite. If so, that may be the reason why Samson felt at home with her. Though she may not have been a prostitute like the woman in 16:1, her mercenary character and her heartlessness give reason enough to believe that she was a profligate woman. Samson is said to have fallen in love with her (16:4), but this must have been an infatuation. The text never says that Delilah loved Samson.”

“The source of Samson’s strength was ultimately the Lord. With the shaving of his hair, Samson’s last Nazirite vow was broken and his strength left him. The Philistines humiliate Samson by blinding him and setting him to work grinding grain, work usually done by a slave or a woman. He suffers the consequences for the flippant revelation of his special giftedness and status with Yahweh.”

**Point 3: Humiliation leads to relying on God (Judg. 16:21-22,26-30).**

“the hair of his head began to grow again. There was no magical power in Samson’s hair, for his strength came only from the Lord (14:6,19; 15:14; 16:20). But the growth of his hair indicates that God was renewing his previous power (cf. vv. 17,19-20). Samson may also have begun to renew his faith (cf. v. 28).”

“The Samson story … ends where it began, with Samson taken home and laid to rest by his sorrowing family. At least they could take comfort from the fact that his death had not been in vain, although we are undoubtedly in a better position to appreciate that than they were. For all his failings he was a forerunner of Jesus, who by his death brought down our great enemy and laid the foundation for a deliverance yet to be revealed in its fullness (Heb. 2:14-15; 1 Pet. 1:3-5).”

**References**

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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.