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Strength in Weakness
Messes. Choices. Faithful God Series
Judges 16:1-31
Pastor Josh Luse

March 26, 2009, would be the last morning that they would ride up on a cable car together. Shane McConkey and JT Holmes were heading up over 9000 feet to the summit deep in the back slopes of the Alps in Italy. They had their ski gear with them, but this is not a place that you would see skiers. Typically, the people that went up on the top of this summit were those that were looking for sightseeing or maybe some hiking because on the top of the summit, it was surrounded by cliffs all the way around. As they got to the top, they strapped on their skis, and they skied down 300 vertical feet before the snow started to get hard and icy. They stopped and they took off their skis and put on their crampons and started traversing across a narrow ledge on the side. It had snowed the night before, and so there was a bit of snow still on the ledge. One of their steps triggered a slight avalanche that went over the edge and fell several hundred feet. It was enough to remind them of the danger that took place in each step that they took. For Shane this was nothing new. Even as a kid in the backpack of his mom's as they would go skiing, he would say, "Bump mommy, bump," and he wanted her to roll through the moguls. He would continue skiing himself—competitively started racing—and it just fueled his desire. He wanted to go faster and faster. Every limit he broke, he wanted to go farther; he wanted to jump higher, get more flips. It would just fuel more and more in him. In fact, he had been base jumping, parachuting—he had done almost every extreme sport you can think of. Now he and JT were set out to do something that no one else had ever done, ever. They were the only two that were currently doing it. It was about 2:00 p.m. when they finally got to the spot where they were trying to get to. They'd used their avalanche shovels to build a small kicker ramp that would go directly over the cliff. During the moments they had as they're preparing, they took rocks and threw them over the edge, and they would count 1, 2, 3...about 11 seconds before they heard it hit the bottom of the cliff. The calculator in their mind thought, "We have 1400 feet before we hit the ground." JT, as he looked out, saw the trees and they looked small, and that gave him a little bit more comfort, maybe a little more room, a little more margin. Finally, it was about 5:30. The film crew that was with them ready to capture this was set. These guys were going to strap on their skis, go over the cliff, pull their release lever, and drop their skis. They were also wearing a wingsuit, so they would look a lot like a flying squirrel as they opened their arms to glide before their chute would finally go off. Nobody else was doing a ski-base wingsuit jump. These two were the only ones, and no one had ever done it from this spot before. As they continued on, JT went first. He radioed over the radio, dropping, did six curves, went over, pulled two back flips, opened his arms and soared for about 15 to 20 seconds before his chute popped open. But he noticed the trees that he had seen were actually smaller trees. He didn't think much of that as he turned around and put his cam back to capture Shane as he came over. But Shane never came. Shane had gone off the jump, and as he was in the air, pulled the release, but only his right ski had released, getting tangled up on his left ski. At that kind of speed, it took him into a just incredible tailspin, one where he couldn't pull his chute on, and he continued to struggle to get it off. Finally he did get both skis off, but that was already nine seconds into the jump, going 110 miles an hour. There just wasn't enough room. His friends said, "He went out with his ski boots on, and that's how he would have wanted it."

It just kind of reminds me of the desire to continue to push the limits, to continue to try and go farther and farther, and it is a lot like the insatiable desire we have with sin, isn't it? The farther we get, the more it invites us to pull us in, to go deeper, desperately hungering for more and yet, the farther we get, the more we realize destruction is right around the corner—so like our chapter that we're going to be following in Judges today.

If you've got your Bibles, you can turn to chapter 16 of Judges and in this chapter we're going to see the final story of Samson. Now this is pretty incredible to me that the story of Samson is more flushed out, there's more detail, there's more time given to it than any other character in the book of Judges. But, honestly, it's a really sad story. But at the end of the story, we find something that will blow your minds. Remember as we get into this too, God had given a covenant to His people that they should follow and keep, and He promised they would experience prosperity and security as they adhered to the covenant. But then we see all through the book of Judges cycles of sin, where they walk in sin; they get oppressed by an enemy; and finally God brings up a leader to free them. They repent, turn to God, and then the cycle starts over yet again. Last week in chapter 15, we saw that the Israelites themselves had captured their judge, turned him over to the Philistines, acknowledging themselves that the Philistines were the ones ruling over them. And so this judge, this leader, this warrior, this one had been promised before he was even born to be the one that would rescue Israel. Let's see where we find him now. Judges, chapter 16, verse 1:

And Samson went to Gaza, (*ESV, Judges 16:1a)

Now Gaza was a large ancient city on the Mediterranean coast. It was on a main trade route that would go down to Egypt, and it was not a place that you would just happen to come to as an Israelite. Samson is now deep into the Southwest territory of the Philistines. A question that you have to ask is, "Why in the world is Samson there?" It goes on to say:

...and there he saw a prostitute, and he went in to her. (Vs. 1b)

Now the text doesn't tell us why he went, but it sure tells us what he does when he gets there. He goes to see a prostitute. Of course, he does. It's Samson! This is par for the course. He's continued to make bad decisions all along. Why should this decision surprise us? It's interesting that we also see that word **saw** because that got him into trouble before. Remember Judges chapter 14, when he wanted a wife. It tells us that he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines. So what does he tell his parents? Verse 3, Judges, chapter 14: "**Go and get her for me, for she is right in my own eyes.** She looks good. It's what I want to do. I'm going to continue to indulge it." Beautiful women have been Samson's Achilles heel, and we're going to see it yet again.

But most people don't wake up and make the decision that Samson just made right here. It starts in small ways. It starts with just that little emotional connection with someone. Or it starts as I pause as I'm scrolling, and I click on that picture. It starts as I send that text, those little ways that start to push the limits. And before we know it, we find ourselves doing something we never thought we would do. But before we just bounce past this verse in this story, let's pause and remember this: God has a plan for holiness in our lives. God is not just some cosmic killjoy that's trying to ruin all of your fun. It's because God understands the devastation that sin brings, the devastation that sexual sin brings into your life. And He also understands the life and the freedom

that comes when walking in holiness according to His plan. So, we could very easily just keep moving, and go right past this, but let me share a couple of stats with you.

Do you realize that in our country, in our nation, porn sites receive more website traffic than Twitter, Instagram, Netflix, LinkedIn, and Pinterest combined? More! In 2019, one porn site recorded that every minute there were 80,000 porn searches. In one year, there were 42 billion searches on just that one site—and there are loads and loads of sites. There's more access, more content, more involvement with porn in our day now than ever before in history. And the statistics would say it's not just outside this room. It's in here too. I'm not trying to do this to shame anyone. I'm not trying to point a finger. But, Church, we have to recognize the holiness that God has called us into. We have to realize that this sin will destroy your life. It will destroy the life of others and it's not just limited to that. I can send that text. I can move in. I can cross the boundary in a million different ways and live outside of God's plan. And it always destroys! It promises it won't hurt, but that promise is always a lie.

So, what do I do? Maybe that's you in here this morning. Start with this: Recognize it, call it what it is. It's sin. It's there to destroy your life. So recognize it; but don't stop there. Repent, acknowledge to God that you desire to turn from that sin, and involve others. Understand James chapter 5 says this, “**Confess your sin to one another and pray for one another.**” Why? Because the way that we grow is in community. Bring it into the light. Let others journey beside you. Maybe it's somebody in your *Life Group* that you trust, where you could say, “Hey, I've got a struggle; can I share it with you? I need somebody praying with me. I need somebody helping me.” Maybe you could come on a Friday night to *Celebrate Recovery*. Every Friday night we have a group that meets, that works through hurts and habits and hang-ups, journeys together in community to live in freedom. We have *Pure Desire* groups here at the church, that are set up to help people experience freedom in this area, and not live bound in bondage. So recognize it, repent, and then renew your desire to lean on God's strength and not your own, because there's no way that you can do it on your own strength. You'll try and try and try again, but you'll never break through. We need God!

So, as we move into verse 2, it says:

The Gazites were told, “Samson has come here.” And they surrounded the place and set an ambush for him all night at the gate of the city. They kept quiet all night, saying, “Let us wait till the light of the morning; then we will kill him.”

So, he enters into Gaza. Let's just say that he wasn't really a welcome guest to the Philistines. Maybe recount a little bit of what he's done. Just a chapter ago, remember that incident with the donkey? Yeah, the jawbone and 1000 dead Philistines? Or what about the fox, and that he's just torched their food supply and ruined their economy? Or those other guys, the 30 guys that he killed and took their clothes, their garments, right? To say that Samson wasn't welcome—that would be the understatement of the century! So what do they do? They hear he's there. They lock the gates, and they hide out, waiting to ambush him, waiting to take him out. Verse 3 goes on to say:

But Samson lay till midnight, and at midnight he arose and took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two posts, and pulled them up, bar and all, and put them on his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that is in front of Hebron.

Now the gates in an ancient city were much more than just an entrance and exit out of the city. This was a place where the people would gather together. The markets would be held by the gates; city leaders would be there with them. Also, they would continue to be having judges there, holding court sessions at the gates. Important decisions would be made; agreements would be made. The gates were extremely significant. They're also symbolic. They're symbolic of the security and the power of that city, often ornately designed—and massive gates. And they provided security. The only way in and out of a fortified city was through those gates, or somehow over that wall. Samson wakes up and he goes and finds those gates are locked.

Now another interesting thing to note and remember is that the word Gaza, the name of this town, means *strong*. And it's not just any Philistine city. It's the capital. Samson finds himself locked in the capital city of the Philistines. Now what does he do? If it's me, and I'm going against that gate, and I run and I try and ram into it, I'm bouncing back like a ping pong ball. There's no way I'm getting through that thing. I'd expect Samson maybe to break the lock, maybe to bust the door open somehow, maybe even he's going to get back and ram it and break it down. But Samson does something even more. The text tells us that “**He took hold of the doors of the gate, and the two posts, and he pulled them up, bar and all.**” These ancient gates would have these large pillars that would be hewn to a point, and they would set on a rock base, and that would be hollowed out that would help it pivot and rotate. And on that, they would have these huge planks that would start to make up the door, put together by these beams either of wood or of iron. The structures would have been massive and huge and Samson takes the entire structure out, places it on his back, and heads to Hebron. Hebron is 40 miles away. If you start in the west at Gaza and start making your way over to the Dead Sea, Hebron sets two thirds of the way there. Now the text tells us that he took them—the doors on his shoulders—all the way to the top of hill that is in front of Hebron. Maybe your text says *opposite of Hebron*. The literal word is *facing Hebron*. So the author's intent is not to tell you distance but what is taking place here. Somewhere between Gaza and Hebron, he takes those doors, sets them up on a spot facing Hebron, and where does that leave the city of Gaza now? Extremely exposed, extremely vulnerable. Not only do they have a gate that's maybe in ruin there; their gate is completely gone. What will they do next? I wonder what the people would think as they're laying in bed at night trying to sleep, but knowing their security has been ripped out. It's gone. Maybe they're posting people there all night long because it's not going to get fixed instantly. It's going to take a while to rebuild some gates.

I wonder what security you and I put our security in, our hope in? Maybe it's not gates. But maybe it's a job. Maybe it's a relationship. Maybe it's some kind of home, or maybe it's our savings. We can put our confidence in a lot of stuff—you can fill in the blank—and because of that, “I feel rock solid.” Psalm 20, verse 7 says this: “**Some trust in chariots, some in horses,** (I would add...some in gates, some in stocks, some in stability...the list goes on and on and on...some in health.) But then the Psalmist goes on to say: “**But we trust in the name of the Lord our God.**” Church, hear this: When we put our confidence in anything else other than God's strength, it's only a matter of

time before that thing will crumble and fall. There is nothing outside of God that we can bolster our strength on. The author sets us up for the next story, which starts in verse 4:

After this he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.

Now we moved from Gaza up north to the Valley of Sorek. This is near the incident where the Jawbone Hill took place, and it tells us that he meets a woman named Delilah. Now we're not told whether she's a Philistine or whether she's an Israelite. But I would assume that she's probably a Philistine for two reasons: Based on location, they're still in the Philistine territory even though they're by the border, and Samson has a track record going for him. And finally, what happens next is there's some kind of connection with the leaders that is taking place. It's interesting who Samson continues to align his life with. Students, remember this: Who you choose to pursue in a relationship matters. It doesn't matter if you're 15 or if you're 50, who you align your life with within a relationship matters. Samson continues to make a train wreck of his relationships, because he's pursuing people that are not pursuing his God. So, what happens? Verse 5:

And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, "Seduce him, and see where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to humble him. And we will each give you 1,100 pieces of silver."

So now the Philistines don't just want to kill him, they want to capture him, and they want to make him pay. They want to torment and torture him. So, he's in love with this woman. She could have said, "Well, you've got the wrong girl." Right? And turn them away. But look at what she's facing. I mean, that kind of money? They would each give her that amount of silver? That's the kind of money that allows you to live like a king. You are set for the rest of your life! So what does she decide to do? Verse 6:

So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me where your great strength lies, and how you might be bound, that one could subdue you."

What? What kind of question is this? Can you be any clearer with your intention of what you're trying to do? She could have totally done this differently. I would picture my wife coming in and be like, "Hey, Josh, how are you so strong? You've got the muscles of an ox." And I would just say, "Babe, I was just born this way." (*laughter*) She's never said that! Not yet! Maybe after this message she will? I don't know? (*laughter*) But Delilah is not even trying to paint a different picture. So how does Samson respond? Verse 7:

Samson said to her, "If they ("if they"...you know he knows exactly what she's talking about) bind me with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, then I shall become weak and be like any other man."

Take note, you're going to see **any other man** a lot in here. See where Samson's at? He's so confident in his own strength, in his own position, he's not worried at all. He's lost sight of where the strength has come from. He feels like it's a right of his. He's had so much success. God has given him a gift of strength to work through him, and yet he's taken that strength and used it all for his own selfish gain. In a sense, he's prostituted God's strength in him, this gift from God. But yet you see him so confident now. He didn't think anything could stop him.

Sometimes, we are the weakest when we're tired and worn down and we're falling into temptation. Sometimes we're at our weakest when we're having loads of success, and we don't think anything can knock us down. Look what he does. He tells her to **use seven fresh bow strings**. Or maybe your translation says *fresh cords*. This means fresh intestines. Again, he's just trampling on the Nazirite vow that he should not touch a dead animal. So what happens? Verse 8:

Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh bowstrings that had not been dried, and she bound him with them. Now she had men lying in ambush in an inner chamber. And she said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he snapped the bowstrings, as a thread of flax snaps when it touches the fire. So the secret of his strength was not known. Then Delilah said to Samson, "Behold, you have mocked me and told me lies. Please tell me how you might be bound." And he said to her, (Are you kidding me? He's still there. She's already shared her intentions. He's told her something. She's acted on him and yet he's still sitting there listening to her yet again. Just blows my mind!) "If they bind me with new ropes that have not been used, then I shall become weak and be like any other man." So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And the men lying in ambush were in an inner chamber. But he snapped the ropes off his arms like a thread. (Vs. 8-12)

New ropes! We know that's not going to work, right? Chapter 15 verse 13, remember the Israelites had gathered around Samson, tied him up with new ropes and turned him over to the Philistines. What happened? He snapped right through them and killed those Philistines. Also, probably why we don't see anything mentioned about the Philistines coming out of hiding. I think they're waiting for him, to make sure his strength is gone before they're even trying to get that guy. So each time they wait because they know if they come out of hiding, they know what he's going to snap next. Verse 13 goes on:

Then Delilah said to Samson, "Until now you have mocked me and told me lies. Tell me how you might be bound." And he said to her, "If you weave the seven locks of my head with the web and fasten it tight with the pin, then I shall become weak and be like any other man." So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his head and wove them into the web. And she made them tight with the pin and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he awoke from his sleep and pulled away the pin, the loom, and the web. (Vs. 13-14)

You notice that he's gotten closer now. Now he's telling a lie, but it's getting a little bit closer, the limits a little bit closer. He wants to get that much closer to the edge. First Corinthians 10, verse 12 says, "***Therefore lest anyone who thinks that he stands take heed, lest you fall.***" If you think you can't fall, be careful; you're at your weakest point.

So last week the Luse's went swimming, and we had a tube. If there's a tube in a swimming pool, inevitably there's going to be king of the tube, right? So we would take turns getting on the tube, trying to push each other off, and my son got on there and he would kind of get set and we would just wait until he kind of had his arms off the tube and he felt pretty confident, and then we would attack. Instantly, when he thought he was at his best and could not be wavered, we would flip that

tube and he'd go flying. A lot like us in our lives when we think that we're untouchable, when we think we have it.

1 Corinthians goes on to say in chapter 10, verse 13, "***No temptation has overtaken you.***" **Overtaken** means *grabbed hold off*. It's like you're in the Octagon ring and temptation's not passively sitting there waiting that you just hopefully might do something. It's grabbing at you. It's hoping to destroy and drag you down into sin. ***No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability.*** Your God is there with you. Your God may allow tests in your life to build your faith, but your God will never tempt you. God is not trying to get you to fall into sin. James 1 tells us that in verse 13 where it says, "***Let no one say when he is tempted, I am being tempted by God, for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself tempts no one.***"

But wait. Then he starts to tell us the game plan of temptation. If Samson would have only listened to this and realized what the enemy was trying to do, to build into his destruction, he could have gotten out. It says in verse 14 in James chapter 1, "***But each person is tempted when he is lured.***" Now let's use fishing to help us see where this transpires to. I've got a nice shiny lure. I throw it in the water; it splashes, and all of a sudden that fish sees something out of the corner of his eye. He catches a glimpse. It's not a sin yet. But temptation is letting itself know that it's there. It catches your eye. It says, "***Temptation lured and then enticed.***" That means to tell lies. That lure is sitting in the water saying, "Look at me; I taste incredibly wonderful." Right? "If you eat me, you'll be satisfied." And then it goes on to say, "***By his own desires,***" which means it targets my selfishness. Your temptation will always be a target of that weakness. For Samson, we know exactly what that weakness was. So that lure starts to tell lies to hit at your weak point, "Hey, you're hungry, aren't you? Why don't you just come grab a bite?" And at that point, James progresses on, talking about this temptation and it says, "***Then desire, when it has conceived,***" this means it gets me thinking about it. All of a sudden that fish starts to turn and says, "I'm just going to go a little bit closer and check it out." All the while, still no sin, but drawing in closer and closer. It says, "***It gives birth to sin.***" The fish thinks, "I'll just take one bite. That's it, just one bite." "***And sin when it is full grown, gives birth to death.***" The hook is set, and destruction has been accomplished.

Now it would be hopeless, but we go back to 1 Corinthians, chapter 10, and at the end of verse 13, it says this, "***But with a temptation, He will also provide a way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.***" He is telling us that there is a way out, that God handcrafts the way to get out of temptation the moment that we stop and say, "God, I need help. Get me out of this. I don't want to fall into this sin." If Samson would have just recognized and had a heart humble enough to seek God's strength in that, how the story could have been different! But he tells her what it is. And in verse 15 she goes on to say:

And she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and you have not told me where your great strength lies." And when she pressed him hard with her words day after day, and urged him, his soul was vexed to death. And he told her all his heart, and said to her, "A razor has never come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God

from my mother's womb. If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak and be like any other man.” (Vs. 15-17)

He's getting worn down. She uses **love**. Verse 4 tells us that he loved her, and now she's using that love. But these guys know nothing of love because their love is so selfish. It's not selfless. They're only in this relationship to see what they can get, what they can gain, not what they can give. He's using her to bolster his ego. The Bible never tells us that he was good looking, never tells us that he was big like it describes Goliath. In fact, he keeps saying, “I'll be like any other man without the strength.” So it seems like his whole identity is wrapped up in the strength, and he's using her to both bolster his identity and also he's using her and her bed. She's trying to use him for the things that she can gain. Sin will always take you farther than you want to go. It will keep you longer than you want to stay in it and will cost you more than you want to pay. The trap has been set, and Samson, even after telling her this, stays. Verse 18:

When Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, “Come up again, for he has told me all his heart.” Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands. She made him sleep on her knees. And she called a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him. And she said, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” And he awoke from his sleep and said, “I will go out as at other times and shake myself free.” (This might be the saddest verse in this whole story that we read next.) **But he did not know that the Lord had left him.** (Vs. 18-20)

He was so far gone, so selfish, so inward focused, that he had forgotten the source of strength, and he didn't even realize the presence of weakness was there.

And the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes and brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles. And he ground at the mill in the prison. (Vs. 21)

What an incredible picture that's taken place! He tells Delilah what has happened. Alcohol has been a part of the story all throughout. It wouldn't be that far off to imagine maybe he's had too much to drink. He's passed out. She calls somebody in. He's there on her lap; they cut his hair. That's it! Game over! As he wakes up, he doesn't have this strength that he's just thought to be his right now. It's gone. Isn't it interesting how the author turns the story back around? These eyes that have caused him so much harm, are now plucked out! He's taken back to Gaza, where he tried to show incredible strength. He's not torching fields along the way. In fact, he goes back there to grind the grain from those fields. He's weak. He's like any other man. Even worse, he's a slave now! In verse 22 the author puts this little comment in to show us the story is not done. It says:

But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved. (Vs. 22)

The hair of his head began to grow again. The hair was not what brought Samson's strength. It's not the source of Samson's strength. God is the source of Samson's strength. The hair was a symbol of the vow of the promise of the covenant that he had made as a Nazirite, to live a certain

way for God. And yet Samson has trampled and broken that promise and that vow his entire life, time and time again. And yet this God is a promise-keeping God. This God is a God that will keep His vow. In chapter 13 verse 7, God promised that this Nazirite, Samson, will be a Nazirite to the day of his death. Two verses before that in verse 5 chapter 13, He promised that Samson would be the one to save Israel from the Philistines; and our God does not break His promises. Verse 23:

Now the lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to rejoice, and they said, “Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand.”

Listen to how much praise is happening in these couple of verses. Imagine if only Sampson would have used his strength to cause Israel to praise their God in this way? Verse 24:

And when the people saw him, they praised their god. For they said, “Our god has given our enemy into our hand, the ravager of our country, who has killed many of us.” And when their hearts were merry, (meaning when they were plastered) they said, “Call Samson, that he may entertain us.” So they called Samson out of the prison, and he entertained them. They made him stand between the pillars. And Samson said to the young man who held him by the hand, “Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them.” Now the house was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof there were about 3,000 men and women, who looked on while Samson entertained. (Vs. 24-27)

There Samson is in Dagon’s temple, the enemy, in the middle of sin and wickedness which he has partaken in his whole life. But now he sits there as a slave, understanding the destruction of all of this, and as he sits in there, everyone that was someone is in this room—a massive place for this temple. All of the officials are there, the “Who’s who” of the Philistines are there and on the roof, 3000 people. It would be like if we took this whole room, packed out every seat and used the balcony as well, sitting up there. This is the kind of room that if this place goes down, this whole nation is disrupted. All the leaders are gone; the influential people are gone, massive amounts of people gone. So what happens? Verse 28:

Then Samson called to the Lord and said, “O Lord GOD, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes.” And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. And Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines.” Then he bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life. Then his brothers and all his family came down and took him and brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. He had judged Israel twenty years. (Vs. 28-31)

In verse 28, we find only the second prayer recorded from Samson in this story. And, honestly, I have trouble with the prayer. It's still selfish it seems. He's not trying to give God glory. He wants revenge for his eyes; he wants to go out. But there are some interesting clues within this. He says,

“Oh, Lord GOD.” it says, “*Oh, Yahweh, Adonai.*” **Yahweh**, this term of endearment that the people would use to their God, the true God. **Adonai**, meaning sovereign. As he prays on, he uses God's name again, but this time he uses **Elohim**, which means the ruler and the judge, the true God. There's something that has taken place in Samson's heart and were it not for Hebrews, I don't think I would understand exactly what God is doing in this picture.

Hebrews chapter 12, says, “*To set our eyes on Jesus.*” Could it be now that Samson, without his sight, is now seeing more clearly than he ever has? His need for God, his own weakness? Hebrews 11 goes on to talk about all these heroes of the faith in the chapter before. It continues to say, “*by faith, by faith,*” and when we get to verse 32 in Hebrews it says this. “*And what more shall I say for time would fail me if Gideon, and Barak, and Samson, and Jephthah, and David, and Samuel, and the prophets, who through faith, conquered kingdoms and forced justice, obtain promise, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness.*”

Samson's story is a sad story. It's the kind of story that makes your stomach turn. It's a story that is a mess and filled with horrible choices. It's a lot like the story of Israel. But also it's a story to help us look in the mirror and see our stories are found in this. And we're not the rescuer. We're not the hero. But in the midst of this is also a story of an incredibly faithful God, a God that is faithful to us even when we are unfaithful to him; a God that is standing with open arms, waiting for that moment when we will stop and repent, and turn to Him. Even though we might not do it perfectly, even though we will never be perfect, He's ready to move in, and help us as we grow in what it looks like to follow Him. Samson was Israel's judge, but Israel needed a better judge. And one day One would come! He, too, would be announced before His birth. This Judge would come and He had power, but He didn't use His power against people. He used it to heal, and He used it to give oppression over darkness. This Judge, too, would be betrayed for silver, much much less silver, and this Judge, too, would die. But in His death, He would provide a way so that everyone could live. What a faithful God!

God, thank You so much that in the midst of our mess, You continue to be faithful. God, we don't deserve it. We will never earn it. There's nothing we can do to obtain it. It's simply a gift from You. God, help us to be a church that longs to walk in holiness, not trample on Your grace. Use Your Spirit in our lives today to show us those areas of temptation that we continue to indulge. Help us to turn to You and lean on Your strength to walk in freedom. God, thank You that You are a faithful God, no matter what. Thank You that we can call You our God. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

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Video:

So, I am thirty-one years old, and I just did six and a half years incarcerated here at NSP in Lincoln, and some in Tecumseh. I guess the biggest destroyer of my life has been addiction, right.

Addiction to drugs, money, sex—you know, really anything that I can fill that void with I used to the extreme and that led me to my incarceration. My drug addiction did. I would make these goals that I would just finish what I had, and then that would be the end of it. Or I would go to sleep that night, and that would be the end of it. I'd wake up a different person. But it never worked out. It's not that I didn't want to; it's just that I couldn't. I mean, I started using when I was 11 years old. And you know, like 20 years, about 20 years of drug addiction just ran rampant in my life. It didn't really matter what anybody else needed or wanted. It was just all about Eli, and it was a very, very lonely place to be.

You know, I'd come to Jesus many times in my life, right? The difference is I would feel like most times in the past, it had been in a jail cell on my knees. I'm in deep, deep danger, right? I'm in trouble, and I need You. Right! And I just need You right now. Once You get me out of this, then I'll take back the wheel. You know, I have this weird image of, you know, me and Jesus riding in the car together. He's driving, and I'm tuning the radio. And, you know, I looked over at Him, and I said, “You know what I think? I'd like to drive.” And He says, “Are you sure?” And I said, “Yeah, I think I'm pretty sure I got it.” And He gets in the passenger side, and I slide over in the driver's seat. And, you know, He puts a seatbelt on and straps His helmet on and He says, “Are you sure you want to do this?” And I said, “Yeah, I think I do.” And off we go.

I was at the Work Release Center here in Lincoln, and I was getting drug in-tox write ups, and I was about to be sent back to prison, and I started going to recovery meetings. Right. At first just because I wanted to make it look like I was doing the next right thing. Right. And the more I sat in there listening to other people, you know, there was one individual when he spoke, it just really hit me here. And so I came to a point where I pulled up to him and I said, “Hey, man, I'm lost. I need some help.” There was a handful of things in my life, right, that no other person on this planet knew that I had done, that had been done to me, and I've told myself my whole life that I would never share that with another person. But it came to a point in our relationship where we were able to sit down, just me and him by a tree, and I let those things go.

These huge barriers that were keeping me from moving forward were like carrying 45-pound weights around my neck for years. And I have had probation officers, judges, lawyers, parents, friends, teachers, all try and get me to turn my life around, to get clean, to stay clean. But nobody could remove that obsession and compulsion to use, right, until I surrendered...until I surrendered, and I asked for help. And because of that, my obsession and compulsion to use drugs has been lifted...and I've been clean for a little over nine months. And that's the truth. You know, I mean, I did six and a half years in prison, and I used the whole time I was in there, because I couldn't stop.

We will never be good enough. That one step out in faith allowed me to get to where I am today, to be sitting here in front of you, ready to make a declaration that I've given my life to the Lord, and I'm ready to live for Jesus. I needed His grace. I needed His forgiveness. I needed to know, you know, that He loved me just as the way I was, right? Even as messed up and as lost as I was, that He loved me, and He was waiting for me to reach out to Him and to give my life over. It only took 31 years, but I've come to learn that the more I put into His hands, and just let Him...let Him drive the car, the safer I am. Like I said, He has a plan for my life that's greater than anything that I could imagine...and I want to know what that plan is.