

Hebrews 11:32

And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, **Samson**, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets.

The story of Samson is pretty famous and I hope each of you read it in preparation for tonight. I am sure that after reading the story you might be wondering if this man is a hero of faith or a monster. We have to remember that all the stories referenced in the great Hall of Faith are for the purpose of showing us all the myriads of ways and crazy situations in which God is always faithful to be our God even though man is rarely faithful (if at all). This story just happens to overemphasize this point with many exclamation marks.

When the story starts off we find out that Israel had once again turned their backs on the Lord:

Judges 13:1-3

Again the Israelites did evil in the Lord's sight, so the Lord handed them over to the Philistines, who oppressed them for forty years. In those days a man named Manoah from the tribe of Dan lived in the town of Zorah. His wife was unable to become pregnant, and they had no children. The angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah's wife and said, "Even though you have been unable to have children, you will soon become pregnant and give birth to a son.

What strikes me about this passage is that the Lord chose to be faithful to His people and raise up a judge without them even asking for His help. In the other stories we found that the people were so sick of being oppressed that in their abject misery they called out and asked the Lord to help them. But in this instance, they had been oppressed by the Philistines for many years and still not even a peep out of them. It is hard to imagine that their hearts had become so hard that they would not even ask.

I want you to keep this in mind for it speaks powerfully of the character and nature of our God. God wants us to come to Him and ask for help. But so many of us don't even ask because we believe he will either not listen to our cries or refuse to do anything about our plight. All I can say after reading this story is that you should go ahead and give Him a try. I believe you will be very surprised at how the Lord moves on your behalf. Go ahead and ask.

I hope your attention was drawn to the number of years they were oppressed. 40 is one of those key biblical numbers. Moses was 40 years old when he left Egypt, he stayed in Midian for 40 years, he wandered with the Israelites in the desert for 40 years, and he was on the mountain for 40 days when receiving the Law. Jesus also wandered in the desert being tempted by Satan for 40 days and 40 nights prior to starting his ministry, and so on.

40 is the number of both testing or probation and chastisement. 40 is viewed as a combination of 5 and 8 with 5 being the number of God's grace and 8 being the number of new beginnings. So the time of testing which God takes you through is actually God's grace so you can experience a time of new life. As such, they were chastised for 40 years and now it was time for the new beginnings.

I want you to also notice in this passage that we are not told that Manoah and his wife were even seeking the Lord about having a child. It is probably because their hearts were just as hard as the others (we will see this play out in how they compromise their faith when it comes to their son). Nevertheless, in His mercy and grace God showed up and promised them a son.

As I said before, the Lord desires us to come to Him and ask; however, I am confident that none of us could even begin to count the number of times or ways that the Lord has showed up and cared for us, provided for us, directed us, and so on when we did not even remember to consider Him much less ask for help. I am so thankful that our God does such great things for us even when we want nothing to do with Him. That is how much He loves us and that is why our God is so amazing.

Judges 13:4-5

So be careful; you must not drink wine or any other alcoholic drink nor eat any forbidden food. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and his hair must never be cut. For he will be dedicated to God as a Nazirite from birth. He will begin to rescue Israel from the Philistines.

So as a Nazarite, Samson had to live a very unique life. This concept of a Nazarite comes from ***Numbers 6:2*** and the word means “one who is set apart” and devoted to the service of God. His job was to begin the deliverance from the Philistines, a job which would ultimately be finished by the prophet Samuel many years later. As a Nazarite, Samson was chosen to provoke, terrorize, and put fear

into the hearts of the Philistines as they were forced to come to terms with the fact that the God of Samson is God.

Now, the Angel of the Lord, who we know from our earlier studies is Jesus, appears only to Manoah's wife and not to him. But in **Judges 13:8**, Manoah asks the Lord for another visitation so they can get more instruction on raising the boy and the Lord responds; just not quite in the way Manoah was expecting.

Judges 13:9-10

God answered Manoah's prayer, and the angel of God appeared once again to his wife as she was sitting in the field. But her husband, Manoah, was not with her. So she quickly ran and told her husband, "The man who appeared to me the other day is here again!"

God answered! Those are some beautiful words. Throughout this study, I want you to focus on the way that God loves to answer us when we ask. Now He does not always answer us in the ways we want or were expecting, but He most definitely hears our prayers and He moves on our behalf.

I want you to let this be your truth about your God. Sadly, for a big part of our lives, most of us have believed that prayer is all about our asking and God remaining in silence towards us. I tell you that is not the case. He hears our every cry and He does move on our behalf.

I love the passage spoken by David in **Psalm 116:1-2**: "I love the Lord because he hears my voice and my prayer for mercy. Because he bends down to listen, I

will pray as long as I have breath!” What imagery. God bends down to listen to our prayers. It is so beautiful. In addition, Solomon said in **Proverbs 15:29**, “The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayers of the righteous.”

Your God hears you; that is a fact. Remember, He reaffirmed this truth to us in **Hebrews 8:11** when He said: “I will be their God, and they will be my people.” If you have accepted Jesus into your heart, He is your God. You belong to Him, period; and He hears you!

It does not matter what you have done or where you are at this point in your life for this commitment to us is not dependent upon our behavior but, according to **Hebrews 6:18** and **Hebrews 8**, upon the God who cannot lie and has made with us a new covenant sealed in the blood of His Son. How is that for intense? You should go back and read **Hebrews 8** or listen to the teachings and refresh your knowledge of this beautiful new covenant.

Now you need to not only believe that God hears you, but then live as if it is your truth. It does not matter if He chooses to answer in a way that is different than what you expected, He will answer and it will be according to His good, perfect, and pleasing will for your life. This truth must invade all your choices and define your thoughts about God—for that is what it means to have faith. Know it, believe it, and live as if it is your truth.

To live as if it is your truth means that: 1) you must ask about all things; yes, even the littlest of things, for God is interested in the details of your life (**Psalm 37:23**); 2) you are willing to wait for the answer and not go out and take matters into your own hands because you are afraid He won't answer or that you won't like His answer; and 3) you are willing to go with His lead trusting yourself to His

sovereign Lordship over your life. This is what it means to have the faith spoken about in **Hebrews 11:6**, the only kind of faith that is pleasing to God.

So the Angel of the Lord reappeared and just repeated the same thing He had told Manoah's wife previously, but then He disappeared in the flame of an offering that Manoah had made to the Lord. The Lord did this so they would be thoroughly convinced of what they had heard and would raise Samson accordingly. This they did and the story then jumps to Samson and the beginning of his assault against the Philistines. This takes us into **Judges 14**.

Now we have to remember the very first line in this story: "And the Israelites did evil in the Lord's sight." I say this because even though Samson was raised as a strict Nazarite it seems his family ignored all the other aspects of the Law and the requirements for righteousness.

So Samson goes to a Philistine village and sees this really hot babe and he wants to have her. So he told his father to go get her for him. He did not ask his father; he told his father. And even though his dad objected and suggested that he choose an Israelite, Samson insisted and his father totally caved and did what he wanted. Keep in mind, marriage with a non-Israelite was strictly forbidden by the Mosaic Law (**Deuteronomy 7:3**). I want us to look at this passage about this woman for the theological implications are fascinating.

Judges 14:3-4

One day when Samson was in Timnah, one of the Philistine women caught his eye. When he returned home, he told his father and mother, "A young Philistine woman in Timnah caught my eye. I want to marry her. Get her for

me." His father and mother objected. "Isn't there even one woman in our tribe or among all the Israelites you could marry?" they asked. "Why must you go to the pagan Philistines to find a wife?" But Samson told his father, "Get her for me! She looks good to me." His father and mother didn't realize the Lord was at work in this, creating an opportunity to work against the Philistines, who ruled over Israel at that time.

I have told you many times that the Lord is God. You see, He is absolutely sovereign and His purposes will not be thwarted even if we, the instruments He has chosen to use, are living in direct disobedience and sin. He is bigger than our sin. He knows the weakness of Samson's flesh and he knows that Manoah will give in to his son, so God uses all of it to accomplish His purposes.

Nothing gets in His way; however, we will see in this story that there are great personal consequences when we choose to live in rebellion to God (so I don't recommend it); but I wanted you to get a glimpse of how big your God truly is.

In addition, I should address the confusion that arises for many believers as a result of this truth. Let me just state the principle upfront and then I will add some explanation. Just because God uses a person, and even does great things through them, does not mean they are a godly man or woman.

There is an important passage that underlines this truth. **Romans 11:29** says, "For the gifts and callings of God are irrevocable." In the context of that passage Paul is dealing with God's promise to once again be merciful to the Jews and lead them to salvation through Jesus Christ, but this truth also applies to how God calls and gifts us as individuals—it is irrevocable.

At times, this can cause us to become both confused and disturbed. For example, we have all seen Christian leaders who seem to live primarily for their flesh as it is pretty clear they don't truly understand what it is to live by faith and walk in the Spirit of God. We have seen their attitudes, we have seen how they treat others, we have seen their religious politics, and so on; but for some reason God still uses them in some amazing and mind-blowing ways.

Therefore, we must not make the mistake of looking at the "results" (or what I would call the merciful work of God through a person's life) as a way to justify the place or position that a person holds or our allegiance to them. In fact, we need to be very careful because the long term consequences of following a person who does not know how to walk by faith in the Spirit of God will in one way or another impact our own walk with God. You see over time most people tend to become just like the one they follow.

Here is a truth which you must remember. God is responsible for outcomes. And He will use donkeys, big fish, evil kings, and totally broken and messed up people to accomplish His work. So again, the fact that God uses a person is not by default a commendation on whether or not we should follow that person or the organization which supports them. **2 Timothy 2:22** makes this clear. It says, "So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart."

Therefore, we are not to be impressed with the gifts (as God gives them and does not take them away just because we sin), and we are not to be impressed with the size, wealth or apparent "success" of a ministry; what we are to focus on

is whether or not a person calls on the Lord from a pure heart and pursues righteousness, faith, love, and peace. **1 Corinthians 13** makes this so clear.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

And, of course, this is talking about God's Agape love; the kind of love that belongs exclusively to God. Agape can only flow from God through a person that has given themselves to Him. You see Agape love is not a gift; it is a character trait of Jesus Himself—His very nature. So if you are surrendered to Jesus such that He is able to freely live through you, His divine love will be expressed through you. If not, it won't.

I hope I have been clear in this point and I hope you robe yourself with this truth. Don't be misled; nothing gets in the way of our God and He will use all things to accomplish His purposes.

Now back to our story. Manoah goes and makes arrangements for Samson to marry this woman and on the way to meet her we get the first glimpse of Samson's gifting.

Judges 14:5-7

As Samson and his parents were going down to Timnah, a young lion suddenly attacked Samson near the vineyards of Timnah. At that moment the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon him, and he ripped the lion's jaws apart with his bare hands. He did it as easily as if it were a young goat. But he didn't tell his father or mother about it.

That's a pretty impressive display of power. Then when Manoah was making some final arrangements for the wedding, Samson threw a party and that is when things quickly started to sour for the Philistines. Samson made a bet with 30 of his Philistine guests by posing a riddle and saying that if they can solve it in the 7-days of celebration, he will give them 30 fine linen clothes and 30 sets of festive clothing; and if they can't they must pay him the same.

After 3-days they still could not figure out Samson's riddle, so on the 4th day they threatened his woman and told her that they will burn down her father's house with her in it if she did not get the answer from Samson. She was terrified and did what they wanted. She used all her womanly ways and manipulation to get Samson to give in to her request. She would say: "You don't love me; you hate me! You have given my people a riddle, but you haven't told me the answer (*Judges 14:16*)."

Well it worked. On the 7th day Samson caved because she was tormenting him and she told the men and just in the nick of time they won the bet. Samson was ticked off. He said: "If you hadn't plowed with my heifer, you wouldn't have solved my riddle (*Judges 14:18*)." I'm sorry; I know that metaphors used in those

days were not too flattering to women but hey it was an agrarian society so I am sure it hit them differently than it hits us. But anyways, Samson immediately leaves the party and goes to a nearby Philistine town, kills 30 men, takes their clothes and pays off his bet.

He was furious and so he went back home to live with his mom and dad. Later on when his temper chilled he decided to go back so he could “sleep” with his wife, but her dad had already given her away to someone else in marriage not thinking that Samson was going to ever fulfill the commitment he had made. So once again, Samson flips out.

He goes and catches 300 foxes and ties their tails together in pairs and he fastens a torch to each pair and lets them loose in the Philistine grain fields burning everything down. He also destroyed their vineyards and olive groves. Now I know this might sound weird and a bit like a tall tale, but we have to remember, this was a supernatural act just like the other great feats of Samson (which we will read about) which involved supernatural strength. So keep in mind, that with God all things are possible no matter how improbable it sounds to us.

When the Philistine leaders realized what happened they were so upset that they took the girl and her father and burned them to death. That was a big mistake. Samson was not happy:

Judges 15:7-8

"Because you did this," Samson vowed, "I won't rest until I take my revenge on you!" So he attacked the Philistines with great fury and killed many of them. Then he went to live in a cave in the rock of Etam.

Well this provoked a response from the Philistines and they in turn invaded Judah and started to attack the Israelites saying that they had come to capture Samson and pay him back for what he had done. The people of Judah were now pulled into the middle of this fight and that is the last place they wanted to be. They told the Philistines that they would capture Samson for them if they would just leave them alone. Again, their hearts were hardened toward God so they did not even seek the Lord; they just opted for self protection. So get this, 3,000 men of Judah go to the cave where Samson was living and they say:

Judges 15:11-16

Don't you realize the Philistines rule over us? What are you doing to us?" [Again, they are only worried about themselves.] But Samson replied, "I only did to them what they did to me." But the men of Judah told him, "We have come to tie you up and hand you over to the Philistines." "All right," Samson said. "But promise that you won't kill me yourselves." "We will only tie you up and hand you over to the Philistines," they replied. "We won't kill you." So they tied him up with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock.

As Samson arrived at Lehi, the Philistines came shouting in triumph [*as if they actually did anything*]. But the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon Samson, and he snapped the ropes on his arms as if they were burnt strands of flax, and they fell from his wrists. Then he found the jawbone of a recently killed donkey. He picked it up and killed 1,000 Philistines with it.

I cannot even truly picture this scene; it is so beyond anything Hollywood can make up. I am sure that the Philistines came fully armed with swords, spears, bow and arrows, slings, rocks, and all other manner of ancient weaponry and unleashed everything they had at Samson. But the Spirit was on him and with just a jawbone of an ass he easily dispatched every bit of their onslaught blocking every assault. He advanced on the soldiers and must have crushed the skulls of these men with blow after blow.

When it was said and done 1,000 Philistines were strewn all over the place. We are told that Samson piled them into a heap, threw the jawbone to the ground, and just walked away. Can you imagine being one of those men of Judah who were standing there? I am sure their jaws were on the floor and probably could not utter a single word but could only stare at each other afraid to move.

What an awesome sight. Samson did not even ask for help, but God still made complete provision for him and allowed the Spirit to come over him. This means that Samson was not walking around like Superman or the Hulk. But it was the Spirit of the Lord who would come upon him just at the right moments to do just what was needed to be done. Remember, this was a reckoning; God was setting things straight and punishing the Philistines for their oppression of the Israelites. This was about God and His people, it was not about Samson.

And this shows us a little more of God's character and nature and how He deals with us. If He calls us into His service, He will enable us and provide for us just at the right moments in order for us to do what needs to be done. ***We can rest in this truth.*** We don't have to ever be afraid of the things the Lord has asked us to

do. We can go forward with confidence knowing that His Spirit will be unleashed within us and He will accomplish His supernatural purposes through us.

Then after this great triumph (which must have even surprised Samson, and I say that because of what he does next), Samson was dying of thirst and he actually cried out to the Lord for the very first time. He must have been so overcome with this supernatural experience that he actually remembers that he has a God, even though he seeks out the Lord purely for selfish reasons:

Judges 15:18-19

You have accomplished this great victory by the strength of your servant. Must I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of these pagans?" So God caused water to gush out of a hollow in the ground at Lehi, and Samson was revived as he drank. Then he named that place "The Spring of the One Who Cried Out," and it is still in Lehi to this day.

God is so merciful. There was more that He wanted to accomplish through Samson, so He provided the water just as Samson had asked. We should never be afraid to ask God for anything. Of course He can say no, but we should come running to Him with everything. The Bible tells us to be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving we are to let our requests be made known to God (***Philippians 4:6***). Remember, it says in "everything!"

Again, this is our God. I don't know who the "god" is that many of you have been serving (the "god" of your ancestors), but—my God—He wants me to take

everything to Him without exception. He does not want me to be anxious for anything because I belong to Him and He has my life in His hands. If you have any doubts about this you should read **Matthew 6:25-33**.

Now we are told in **Judges 15:20** that Samson judged Israel for 20 years during the time that the Philistines dominated the land. Now based on his character and wonderful judgment with women, I do not believe that Samson was a judge like Deborah who was a great leader of her people; rather, he was probably more like Gideon or Barak where he was merely called upon to judge the Philistines (and not the Israelites) with great supernatural feats. I say that because this next story reminds us of Samson's base character and God's unbelievable faithfulness.

Judges 16:1-3

One day Samson went to the Philistine town of Gaza and spent the night with a prostitute. Word soon spread that Samson was there, so the men of Gaza gathered together and waited all night at the town gates. They kept quiet during the night, saying to themselves, "When the light of morning comes, we will kill him." But Samson stayed in bed only until midnight. Then he got up, took hold of the doors of the town gate, including the two posts, and lifted them up, bar and all. He put them on his shoulders and carried them all the way to the top of the hill across from Hebron.

Once again, this sight must have been incredible and I am sure the Philistines were left shaking in their boots. But this man Samson was definitely a piece of work. Again, I'm not sure if he was a hero or a monster.

Next the story moves to the climax and that is the part about Delilah. Samson had fallen in love with Delilah who was also a Philistine woman and the Philistine rulers told her that they will each pay her 1,100 pieces of silver (which was a lot of money) if she could seduce from him the source of his strength and then deprive him of his power. Delilah was game; she wanted the money. It seems that Samson has absolutely no discretion when it comes to women and I attribute that to the fact that he continually walked in rebellion to the fundamental Laws of God.

That happens to us as well. When we give ourselves over to things that seduce our flesh in ways that do not honor God, it seems that we become blind to even some of the most basic truths about God and about us. For example, we forget that He loves us, we forget that He passionately desires us, we forget that there is nothing we can do to separate ourselves from His love, we forget that we are forgiven, that we are holy, and we forget that we belong to Him. That is why we must not give ourselves to such things and always remember that we have been set apart, like a Nazarite, exclusively for God.

So Delilah presumably gives Samson what he wants and what makes him happy while at the same time she attempts to obtain his secret. She hid some men in her house and they were ready to jump out and seize Samson as soon as she stripped him of his power. So she asks him for his secret and her asking turned into nagging and her nagging into tormenting and Samson could not handle it. So he made up some stories which just really aggravated her.

Samson said that if he was tied up with 7-new bow stings that had not been dried that he would become as weak as anyone else. So she did it and then cried out to Samson, “the Philistines are here to capture you,” and he just broke the

strings as if they were nothing to him. Then he said if she tied him up with brand new ropes that had never been used he would become weak; but when she did it once again he just snapped the ropes as if they were thread. Then a third time he said that if his hair was braided into fabric on her loom that he would lose his strength. But again the results were the same.

Judges 16:15-16

Then Delilah pouted, "How can you tell me, 'I love you,' when you don't share your secrets with me? You've made fun of me three times now, and you still haven't told me what makes you so strong!" She tormented him with her nagging day after day and he was sick to death of it.

Finally Samson told her his secret. He explained that he was a Nazarite and part of the vow was that he was never to cut his hair and if he did he would become just a regular man. She knew she had conquered his heart and that he finally told her the truth. While he slept, she had his hair shaved and he woke up to the Philistines dragging him away. Finally, the great and mighty Samson was captured.

The Philistines gouged out his eyes (which sounds horrific) and then bound him in chains and forced him to grind grain in the prison. But soon his hair began to grow again. Oops, a little detail they overlooked.

Well the Philistines were not strangers to parties and this was cause for a party. The rulers hosted a great festival in honor of their "god" Dagon who they claimed gave them victory over Samson. Dagon was part fish and part man; kind of a

funny looking “god.” However, little did the Philistines know that the trap they set for Samson was actually a trap which the Lord had set for them.

Thus, they all gathered together in their local temple and the people had been heavily drinking and they demanded that the leaders bring out Samson so they can all revel in their victory. So Samson was brought up from the prison and placed between these two large pillars that were the central support for the temple. Let’s pick up the story from here:

Judges 16:26-30

Samson said to the young servant who was leading him by the hand, "Place my hands against the pillars that hold up the temple. I want to rest against them." Now the temple was completely filled with people. All the Philistine rulers were there, and there were about 3,000 men and women on the roof who were watching as Samson amused them.

Then Samson prayed to the Lord, "Sovereign Lord, remember me again. O God, please strengthen me just one more time. With one blow let me pay back the Philistines for the loss of my two eyes." Then Samson put his hands on the two center pillars that held up the temple. Pushing against them with both hands, he prayed, "Let me die with the Philistines." And the temple crashed down on the Philistine rulers and all the people. So he killed more people when he died than he had during his entire lifetime.

Once again, Samson asks God for a favor and is entirely consumed with self. He does not care at all that the Philistines had oppressed Israel for 40 years; he was in a personal war with them. This was about the “ME.” They took his eyes and he wanted revenge. That is what his prayer was about; yet, still God answered him not because his motives were right or pure, but because his request was perfectly in alignment with the will of the Lord. Samson was raised up to judge the Philistines and the Lord had perfectly positioned him to deliver one massive blow; therefore, the Lord was pleased to answer his prayer. They died and he died, just as Samson wanted.

What a story that really underscores the point I made last week about how **Hebrews 11**, the great Hall of Faith, is about about God’s faithfulness in the midst of our faithlessness and weaknesses. Even if we stretched our imaginations, we cannot really classify Samson as a man of faith; at least not in the way we normally think of men and women of faith. Yes, it seemed he knew his power came from the Lord and twice we see him ask the Lord for help, but that is it. And both of those requests were about satisfying his own needs and had nothing to do with why the Lord had raised him up and given him such great power. But where we lack, God is infinitely sufficient and always accomplishes His will.

One other point I want to make in closing is that this final prayer of Samson in many ways parallels a key passage about prayer and asking God for things that we find in **1 John 5:14-15** which says: “And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.”

Did you notice that this passage does not address motives at all but it deals with alignment. Now, it makes sense that if our motives are in alignment with the Spirit of God that our requests will also be; which is an awesome reality. But there are times where the motives behind our requests may be askew in part or completely; but God still surprisingly not only hears but answers us.

Again, this is a testament to the sovereignty of God over our lives. He will fulfill His plans and His purposes and even our selfishness will not circumvent His will. Nevertheless, it is better to be in alignment with the Lord in our heart and motives so that we can personally have confidence and know that He hears us and answers us. I doubt Samson had this confidence. He prayed and probably crossed his fingers hoping the Lord would hear him.

This reminds me of the rest of a verse which we read earlier about coming to God with everything. He says:

Philippians 4:6-7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

That is what I want. I don't want to live like Samson. I want to know my God so completely and so trust Him with my entire life that I can ask about everything, worry about nothing, trusting myself so completely to Him that His peace, a peace

which is inconceivable, just settles in my soul and guards both my heart and my mind in Christ Jesus. I know that is what you want as well. Let's learn from Samson and let's remember God's faithfulness and choose to give ourselves to Him and live the truth which we know about our God.

Let's Pray.