

**St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin  
June 3, 2018**

**Ordinary People – Extraordinary God  
Samson: When Strong Men are Weak**

**Judges 14**

For the next three weeks we are studying a sad story in the history of God's people. It is a story of a strong man who was incredibly weak.

The story begins as so many Bible history accounts do... a couple are unable to have a child. But then the Angel of the LORD, the Son of God himself, appears to them and announces that they will have a child. He will be a Nazarite from birth, dedicated to God. As part of that Nazarite vow, he will never have his hair cut. The Angel of the LORD announces that their son "will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines" (Judges 13:5).

Try to imagine the joy these parents experienced at the birth of their son Samson. Not only a son, but one whom God would use as part of his master plan to rescue his people.

But their joy must have quickly turned to sorrow as they saw that the truth: Their strong son was weak. We see that weakness in Judges 14.

*Samson went down to Timnah and saw there a young Philistine woman.<sup>2</sup> When he returned, he said to his father and mother, "I have seen a Philistine woman in Timnah; now get her for me as my wife."*

*<sup>3</sup> His father and mother replied, "Isn't there an acceptable woman among your relatives or among all our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife?"*

*But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me. She's the right one for me."<sup>4</sup> (His parents did not know that this was from the LORD, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines; for at that time they were ruling over Israel.)*

*<sup>5</sup> Samson went down to Timnah together with his father and mother. As they approached the vineyards of Timnah, suddenly a young lion came roaring toward him. <sup>6</sup> The Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon him so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat. But he told neither his father nor his mother what he had done. <sup>7</sup> Then he went down and talked with the woman, and he liked her.*

*<sup>8</sup> Some time later, when he went back to marry her, he turned aside to look at the lion's carcass, and in it he saw a swarm of bees and some honey. <sup>9</sup> He scooped out the honey with his hands and ate as he went along. When he rejoined his parents, he gave them some, and they too ate it. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey from the lion's carcass.*

*<sup>10</sup> Now his father went down to see the woman. And there Samson held a feast, as was customary for young men. <sup>11</sup> When the people saw him, they chose thirty men to be his companions.*

*<sup>12</sup> “Let me tell you a riddle,” Samson said to them. “If you can give me the answer within the seven days of the feast, I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty sets of clothes. <sup>13</sup> If you can’t tell me the answer, you must give me thirty linen garments and thirty sets of clothes.”*

*“Tell us your riddle,” they said. “Let’s hear it.”*

*<sup>14</sup> He replied,*

*“Out of the eater, something to eat;  
out of the strong, something sweet.”*

*For three days they could not give the answer.*

*<sup>15</sup> On the fourth day, they said to Samson’s wife, “Coax your husband into explaining the riddle for us, or we will burn you and your father’s household to death. Did you invite us here to steal our property?”*

*<sup>16</sup> Then Samson’s wife threw herself on him, sobbing, “You hate me! You don’t really love me. You’ve given my people a riddle, but you haven’t told me the answer.”*

*“I haven’t even explained it to my father or mother,” he replied, “so why should I explain it to you?” <sup>17</sup> She cried the whole seven days of the feast. So on the seventh day he finally told her, because she continued to press him. She in turn explained the riddle to her people.*

*<sup>18</sup> Before sunset on the seventh day the men of the town said to him,*

*“What is sweeter than honey?  
What is stronger than a lion?”*

*Samson said to them,*

*“If you had not plowed with my heifer,  
you would not have solved my riddle.”*

*<sup>19</sup> Then the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon him. He went down to Ashkelon, struck down thirty of their men, stripped them of everything and gave their clothes to those who had explained the riddle. Burning with anger, he returned to his father’s home. <sup>20</sup> And Samson’s wife was given to one of his companions who had attended him at the feast.*

Yes, Samson was physically strong. But very quickly we are disgusted by his obvious weakness. He was a hot-tempered, womanizing heathen.

Or so it would appear.

But did you know that Samson is included in the Heroes of Faith chapter in Hebrews 11?

<sup>32</sup> And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, <sup>33</sup> who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, <sup>34</sup> quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies (Hebrews 11:32-34).

“Through faith... became powerful in battle.” Certainly that is a reference to Samson.

It is easy to dismiss Samson as a heathen, but in spite of all his weaknesses, he was a believer. That’s why I’d like to change the title of our message for today from:

### **“When Strong Men are Weak”**

To:

### **“When Strong Christian Men are Weak”**

We will get far more out of Samson’s account when we recognize that he was a believer just like us.

But the word “when” implies there are times when strong Christian men are not weak. But the weakness that Samson shows in his life is present in Christian men all the time. If you are familiar with the life of the Apostle Paul, you would think of him as a strong Christian man. Yet listen to him talk about his weakness:

For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. <sup>19</sup> For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing (Romans 7:18-19).

What makes a strong Christian man weak? It is that sinful nature that is always with him, leading him to do the evil that the new man or the new self or the spirit within him does not want to do. It is not a “when” that strong Christian men are weak. It is not a “once in a while” kind of thing. It is a fact all the time. So let’s change the word “when” to “because.”

### **Because Strong Christian Men are Weak**

But that leaves the impression that this is a gender-specific sermon. In a couple of weeks, when my brothers are speaking on Father’s Day, we will hear applications to men to be the strong Christian father-figures that those around us need. But today this isn’t a gender-specific sermon. The reality is that there are strong Christian women and they have the same weakness. So again, let’s change it to...

### **Because Strong Christian Men and Women are Weak,**

You may have noticed I also added a comma. This isn't a complete sentence. It is a dependent clause. We still have to supply the main statement, which leads us to the two lessons I discovered as I prayed about this part of Samson's life.

- 1. Because Strong Christian Men and Women are Weak, God is Despised.**
- 2. Because Strong Christian Men and Women are Weak, God is Glorified.**

I would encourage you to read the Book of Judges over the next three weeks, just one chapter a day, to see the historical background for this strong man Samson. He was the product of a society that had long despised their God. It is frightening to see evidence that the same downward spiritual spiral is taking place in our own society. I don't have time to talk about 1. A. in our outline now, but a Daily Reading of Judges is available in the Welcome Center.

For Samson, that disregard for God was shown in his view of the opposite sex. God had command his people to marry within the nation of Israel. His parents protested. Choose a good believing Israelite girl. But Samson said, "Get her for me, for she looks good to me" (Judges 14:3 *New American Standard Bible*). It seems that he hadn't even talked with her. Later it says, "He talked with the woman, and he liked her" (Judges 14:7).

Don't we see that same weakness in strong Christian men and women today? I appreciate the candor of Pastor Mike Novotny in his book about sexuality.

Did you know that I am a natural-born polygamist? Don't panic. I love my wife. I haven't cheated on her. The truth is when a commercial comes on showing models in their underwear, I have to force myself to look away. I also have to fight the natural desire that 98% of men feel to lust after countless women, wedding ring be damned. I was born that way (*Gay and God*, page 37).

What Peter writes in his first letter convicts me as a man, and probably convicts many a woman as well.

<sup>3</sup> Wives must not let their beauty be something external. Beauty doesn't come from hairstyles, gold jewelry, or clothes. <sup>4</sup> Rather, beauty is something internal that can't be destroyed. Beauty expresses itself in a gentle and quiet attitude which God considers precious (1 Peter 3:3-4, *God's Word Translation*).

Can we claim moral superiority over Samson? Have I made it clear to all the women around me that their true beauty is the gentle and quiet spirit? Have you as a woman always looked at yourself and other women with the understanding that your true beauty is that gentle and quiet spirit?

What is the best way to deal with your weaknesses? Samson's was to hide it in his strength. He used his physical strength to justify his own weakness. Have we done the same? Have we caused God to be despised in the world around us because we use our position of strength to hide our weaknesses?

Samson probably thought he was hiding his weakness well in his magnificent feats of strength... but we can certainly see through it. And the people around us can see how we try to use our strength to hide our weaknesses... and God is despised in the world because of the hypocrisy others see in us.

This is what Satan wants to do. He wants to use our weaknesses to destroy any work that a strong Christian man or woman might do.

But God had another plan for Samson. He does for us too.

It amazes me that after Samson despises his parents and despises God because of his sexual desire, the text says, “His parents did not know that this was from the LORD, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines” (Judges 14:4).

Don’t try to understand or figure this out. This isn’t a riddle like what Samson told his bridal companions, that if you just think about it, maybe you will get an answer. God is omniscient, he is all knowing. He didn’t cause Samson’s sins. But he did factor in Samson’s weakness in His master plan.

So too, God doesn’t make us sin. But he is able to make even our weaknesses work out so that he is glorified in them.

What is your weakness... how does your sinful nature cause you to fall into sin again and again?

God is glorified when we are honest with ourselves and those around us who know our sins. Rather than trying to conceal them, let’s admit them. “Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy” (Proverbs 28:13).

Let God be glorified by confessing that you need a God who would be your rescuer, that you don’t have the strength to stand up against sin and the devil, but that you trust in the strong man Jesus who as God could pay for your sins.

Because strong Christian men and women like you are weak, God is glorified in your pardon.

At the Ministry Growth Team, it was mentioned that many Christians don’t know how to share their faith. Perhaps it is because we aren’t willing to use our weaknesses to glorify God. After David confessed his sins in Psalm 51 he wrote, “Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you” (Psalm 51:13).

How do you share your faith? By talking about how your faith has helped you in your weakness? That weakness may be a sin, it may be an illness. How have you been reminded of your weaknesses? Admit them and then talk about how God’s strength in Christ has gotten you through. That’s how you share your faith in Jesus.

That’s one of the reasons why I am excited about the prospect of developing a Christian counseling center on our campus. It will help us be a place where we admit our weaknesses and claim God’s strength. I can tell you that it was a huge blessing for me to be able to speak to a Christian counselor, admitting my weaknesses and claiming Christ’s forgiveness. I have been able to use that experience over and over again when I’ve talked with people. Sharing your faith isn’t just some canned approach, it is saying, “this is where I fail, and this is how Jesus has picked me up.”

And then let God be glorified in your strengths.

Every one of you who believes in Jesus as your Savior is a strong Christian man or a strong Christian woman in some way. Your weaknesses don't negate your strengths. Use your strengths to be a blessing to others. Your strength might be being patient, it might you are a good listener.

I would encourage you to contact Emily Krill at [ekrill@stpaulmuskego.org](mailto:ekrill@stpaulmuskego.org) and ask her about an I AM Built workshop. I so appreciated the time I spent with her. She helped me see that, in spite of my weaknesses, God has given me strengths to use in his kingdom. I so appreciate that I can go back again and again to my I AM Built statement to be reminded that I too am strong in Christ. "I am built to see patterns in the past and present that lead to new ideas for the future of God's family."

When you read over Samson's life in the next weeks, you might think, "Is this the best that God could do for a judge?" When you look at your own life and your weaknesses, you might think, "Is this the best that God could do for a person to do his will today?"

The answer is, "Yes!" God raised up Samson, strengths and weaknesses, to be used to his glory. God has raised up you, strengths and weaknesses, to be used to his glory.

Because strong Christian men and women like you confess their weaknesses to God and celebrate his pardon, God is not despised in your weaknesses. He is glorified. And he has positioned you to use your strengths to begin the rescue of the people around you. Yes, even in you and me, God is glorified. Amen.

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### **My Next Steps in Letting My Extraordinary God Use an Ordinary Person Like Me**

- **Learn from History:** Over the next three weeks, read the Book of Judges, a chapter per day, to see that our is a God who uses the strengths of weak Christians to accomplish his purpose. If you don't have a Bible, pick one up at the Welcome Center.
- **Confess your Weaknesses:** Meditate on the fact that the Holy Spirit placed Samson's sins and yours on the same level in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.
- **Claim your Strengths:** Attend an "I am Built" workshop to discover the strengths God has given you for the good of his kingdom. For more information contact Emily Krill at [ekrill@stpaulmuskego.org](mailto:ekrill@stpaulmuskego.org).

# GroupWork

1. Where have you seen God work in your life this past week?
2. Read Judges 14:1-20.
  - What words would you use to describe Samson based on these verses?
  - Does it surprise you to find Samson listed in the Heroes of Faith chapter (Hebrews 11:32-34)? Why or why not?
  - What can we learn about God from Judges 14 and Hebrews 11:32-34?
3. Read 1 Peter 3:3-4. Samson's weakness toward sexual sin is prevalent today. How did Samson fail to understand true beauty? How does this failure affect men and women today?
4. Samson was incredibly strong. Help each person in the group recognize at least one area in which God has made them strong (examples... compassion, willingness to serve, leadership, ability to listen well, patience, etc.). Discuss the possibility of attending an "I am Built" workshop as a group to learn your strengths. For more information contact Emily Krill at [ekrill@stpaulmuskego.org](mailto:ekrill@stpaulmuskego.org) or 262-510-8109.
5. Read 2 Corinthians 12:1-10.
  - What makes Paul's testimony about his thorn in the flesh so memorable?
  - Share a time in your life when God seemed to say to you, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." How could this time in your life help you share your faith in Jesus with others?
6. Break up into pairs or triads to pray for each other, that your partner(s) would use their strengths to glorify God.