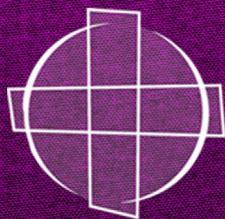


Donald J. Wills  
Senior Pastor

MAY  
2018

**TRANS***f***ORMED**2018  
JUDGES 12-15  
IN OUR ATTITUDES



ADULT CONNECT  
CLASS CURRICULUM

The purpose of First Baptist Church of Fort Worth is to **introduce** people into a loving relationship with Jesus, **instruct** them in spiritual growth through God's Word, **inspire** them to serve for God's kingdom, and **incorporate** them in authentic worship to glorify God.

## *A Note From Our Pastor*

Dear FBC family and friends,

This month in Judges we are reminded of the transforming grace of God when we simply choose to follow Him. Time and again in the life of Sampson, we see a man struggling with doing what he desires versus what he knows the Lord has called him to do. Following our own desires and plan often does not work in our best interest nor is it pleasing to the Lord. When we follow God's plan, however, He fulfills His will and aligns our desires with His. David reminds us in Psalm 37:4, "Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart." It is important to note that when we delight in Him our desires will change if we fully surrender to the guidance of His Spirit.

The layout of this curriculum begins with a 7-day approach for you to get the most from each lesson. We encourage each member to use the suggested 7-day approach for each one's own personal study and growth in your relationship with the Lord. In the process of study if you have any questions arise please feel free to contact your Bible study teacher or one of our staff members to assist you in your learning.

As we consider the events that unfold in the life of Sampson, may we see and understand the transforming grace of God. If we abandon God's purpose and plan for us, we must remember 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Above all, we must trust that God's way is always the best way!

-Blessings  
Pastor Don



## *Suggested Plan for Using this Bible Study Guide Effectively*

### *Introduce*

**Day 1:** Read and meditate on the Scripture, asking God to guide you throughout the week as you study His Word and allowing Him to speak to you through the Spirit. Read the **INTRODUCE** portion of the lesson commentary.

### *Instruct*

**Day 2:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and read the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary. Concentrate on memorizing the focal verse for that particular week.

**Day 3:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and answer the focal questions in the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary.

### *Inspire*

**Day 4:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and begin thinking about tangible ways you can incorporate the principles you learned in your daily life. Read the **INSPIRE** portion of the lesson commentary.

### *Incorporate*

**Day 5:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and apply the theological principle that you learned from this week in a tangible way. Use the **INCORPORATE** portion of the lesson commentary to guide you.

**Day 6:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and in the journal section describe how God allowed you to apply this passage in a real and tangible way this week.

**Day 7:** Review the Scripture and share with others in your Connect Class on Sunday morning at 9:30am. Be ready to share your experience about how God allowed you to apply the lesson for that week.

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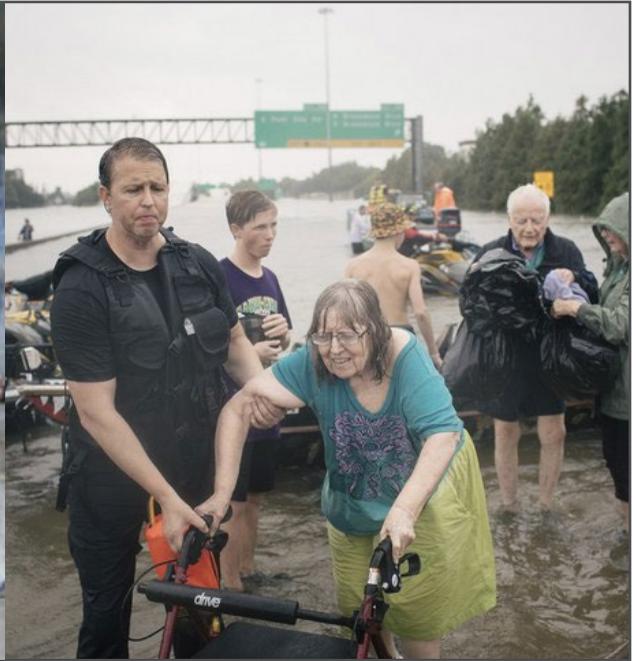


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Be Transformed from  
Vengeance to Forgiveness

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*May 6, 2018*



# *Be Transformed from Violent to Compassionate*

## *Judges 12:1-15*

Focal Verse:

"Then the men of Ephraim gathered together, crossed over toward Zaphon, and said to Jephthah, 'Why did you cross over to fight against the people of Ammon, and did not call us to go with you? We will burn your house down on you with fire!'"

Judges 12:1

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## Introduce

We live in a world fascinated and even obsessed with violence as displayed in almost every facet of our society. Unfortunately, the gratuitous violence we have come to celebrate through movies, video games, and sports has permeated our society through mass murder, a maniacal bomber in Austin, road rage incidents, political violence, and escalating violence in the home and workplace. Violence, destruction of property, and tantrums have become the preferred way to settle disputes and obtain one's desires—whether fame and notoriety, revenge, or simply to make a statement about something with which one disagrees. This onslaught of violence is nothing new to our world or even unique to our society, but it has affected our world since Cain enacted vengeance by murdering his brother Abel and is symptomatic of our sinful human nature.

In the mid 90s, I went with my church youth group to a minor league hockey game for the Nashville Knights. For most of the game, the crowd was disengaged, focusing more on their snacks and conversation with other fans than the game, but that all changed when the puck stopped, the sticks dropped, and their fists socked their opponent. The crowd stood, focused their attention on the fight, and began to roar with excitement, inviting the players to fight brutally; when the fight ended, the crowd returned to being disengaged. Violence has come to define our sports and athletes; although best known for his 5,000 plus strikeouts and seven no-hitters, Nolan Ryan's violent brawl with Robin Ventura



## Introduce

always tops his list of “achievements.” These violent acts serve to demonstrate how anger and hatred characterize our world because we have chosen to rebel against the Lord.

Violence and aggression have always defined our sinful condition as humans from the unrivaled cruelty of the Assyrians in the Ancient Near East to the Gladiatorial games in ancient Rome to modern conflicts, such as the World Wars and genocides in Africa and the Middle East. Judges [chapter 12](#) is no exception and opens with a violent threat by the men of Ephraim against Jephthah to burn his house down because he had not called them to war with the Ammonites (12:1). Eventually, this unrestrained violence led to another civil war within Israel just as it did with Gideon’s son, Abimelech, who sought and obtained power through violence. Yet, the most-violent and ruthless act ever perpetrated was against the only perfect One to have ever lived on earth; through this violence done unto Christ on the cross, we have hope and life. Through the life that He gives, we can be transformed from violent to compassionate just as He was compassionate toward us as a sinful, undeserving person who rebelled against Him.

Key  
Question

In what ways do you see violence permeating our world today?

## Judges 12:1-3

### RESENTMENT LEADING TO VIOLENCE:

After **Jephthah** and those from Gilead defeated the Ammonites, instead of being grateful **the men of Ephraim** became so enraged that they **crossed** the Jordan River eastward toward **Zaphon** to confront the warrior who led them (v. 1). Just as they had done to Gideon after the defeat of the Midianites, the bitter and resentful **men of Ephraim** threatened **Jephthah** for not including them in the battle with **Ammon** (see [Judg 8:1](#)); however, this time their ire and rage led to even greater violence directed toward the person whom the Lord used to deliver them. With Gideon, they merely spoke “sharply” and “reprimanded” him, but to **Jephthah** they physically threatened him with violence by **burning his house down on him with fire**. Not only were they willing to commit arson in seeking revenge, but ultimately they intended to commit murder by burning him alive. As we have seen both here with **Jephthah** and in chapter 8 with Gideon, **the men of Ephraim** were proud, self-centered, and arrogant; instead of wanting the best for the nation and giving thanks to the Lord for His deliverance, they wanted the glory for themselves.

What are some of the results if we don't properly deal with our anger?

Question  
# 1

The tribe of Ephraim's anger had come to a boiling point where they metaphorically were about to explode with jealousy and animosity toward one of their fellow Israelites. When left unresolved, anger and resentment

## Instruct

at the very least cause hard feelings and separation between people, but it often leads directly to violent outbursts as well. Most of us probably have some familiarity with a pressure cooker, or the more modern “Instant Pot,” used to preserve food during the canning process. To ensure an air-tight seal, Mason jars are placed in a pot on the stove with water in it and an air-tight lid that uses the pressure of the



steam to seal the items therein. At the top of the cooker, a small exhaust valve rattles as the water boils and turns to steam to relieve some of the pressure inside the pot; if that valve did not function properly and no steam could escape, a violent and perhaps even deadly explosion would result. In the same way, if we leave anger and resentment unresolved in our lives without an effective way to deal with it, we risk lashing out at others in an unloving and perhaps even violent way.

Neither Jephthah or those from Ephraim took time to calm down, seek the Lord, or forgive the other party. They entered a heated exchange of words which caused the situation to escalate. Just as mediation failed with the Ammonites, Jephthah’s words fall on deaf ears here as well. He begins his argument by blaming the **men of Ephraim**; although the Bible doesn’t mention his attempt to call them to war (see [Judg 11:29](#)), he insists that he called them and they did not come to his aid during this **great struggle with the people of Ammon** (v. 2). Jephthah further

stokes the fire by claiming that he **took** matters into his own **hands** when he **saw** that they **would not deliver** him. Although he rightly attributes the victory to **the Lord**, his follow-up with an accusatory question merely makes the situation worse; he asks them **why** they **have come to fight** him **this day** (v. 3).



When attempting to mediate a tense situation, not only must we choose our words wisely, but we must seek wisdom from the Lord before we speak ([Jas 1:19](#)).

Why is it important to take time to reflect on a contentious issue and choose our words wisely?

Question  
# 2

### Judges 12:4-7

#### **RETALIATION WITH VIOLENCE:**

Because neither party was willing to back down and forgive, a civil war in Israel resulted. Enraged at the audacity of Ephraim for insulting him, Jephthah **gathered all the men of Gilead** to wage war against his fellow countrymen (v. 4). Whereas God had been gracious and merciful to a people who constantly rebelled against Him, Jephthah's response was exactly opposite. Rather than seeking reconciliation through forgiveness, he retaliated with violence. Likewise, the people of Ephraim had become so self-absorbed and self-centered that they insulted those of the tribe of Gad (i.e. **Gileadites**) because they lived along with Manasseh on the east

side of the Jordan. By identifying them as **fugitives of Ephraim**, they saw them as being the “black sheep” of the family from the “wrong side of the tracks” so-to-speak; therefore, in their eyes, they, as the people from **Ephraim**, were superior to them in every way.

How does arrogance lead to dissension and violence in our own culture?

Question  
# 3

**The men of Ephraim** then attempted to escape westward over the **Jordan** to their own territory after having insulted Jephthah, but the **Gileadites** cut them off before they could cross (v. 5). To determine if they were from Ephraim before letting them cross the **Jordan**, the **Gileadites** had them say the word **shibboleth** (*shib-bow-let*) which they pronounced differently as **sibboleth** (*sib-bow-let*). Today, this would be akin to someone from Texas saying the word car or star and someone from the Northeast, particularly Boston, pronouncing it as ca' or sta' without the letter r on the end of the words. Thus, they weren't saying two different words, but their accents identified from what tribe or region they came. After identifying them as Ephraimites, those in Jephthah's company put them to death; in all, they slaughtered 42,000 of their fellow countrymen—their brothers whom the Lord had also delivered



*1 John 4:20: "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?"*

from Egypt and to whom He had given the Promised Land (v. 6). Unlike many of the previous judges, the land had no peace or rest after the **six-year** reign of Jephthah; this period simply ends by noting his death and burial **among the cities of Gilead** (v. 7). As we will see, the strife and unrest leads to a period of uncertainty and eventually a forty-year period of domination by the Philistines prior to the rise of Samson.

We see senseless violence regularly in our society with people who are self-centered and unwilling to extend compassion or grace to others.

Road rage has become a common occurrence in Tarrant County as traffic increases and drivers regard their time as more precious than others and see the roadway as theirs to do whatever they please. In going to a Connect Group two months ago, I was driving behind



a pick-up truck on the two-lane Blue Mound Road through some of the new housing additions near the Bureau of Engraving and Printing when suddenly a car turning left grew tired of waiting and pulled out in front of the truck. Slamming on his brakes, the driver of the truck flashed his bright lights at the car and laid on his horn. After making a few vulgar gestures, the driver of the car slammed on his brakes and stopped in the middle of the road. The driver then got out of his car and the driver of the truck soon followed, continuing to block the entire road. Not knowing whether guns would be drawn or what violence may happen, I passed half on the shoulder and half in the ditch to leave the scene and avoid the result of this scuffle. This fit of violence happened because both

## Instruct

drivers were self-centered and the one in the truck who was wronged was unwilling to forgive.

We live in a world where people put their needs and desires before those of others, but the God who created us extends compassion and mercy to all—even though every one of us rebelled against Him. In His great love for us, God exercises extraordinary patience, offering us chance after chance to recognize our sinfulness and repent. The prophet Isaiah writes, “Therefore the Lord will wait, that He may be gracious to you; and therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for Him” ([Isa 30:18](#)). Although God is just and directs His wrath and anger against sin, He has given us a way to escape judgment through the greatest sacrifice ever given—His Son Jesus. Because the Lord exemplifies compassion, grace, and mercy which He has kindly lavished upon each of us who has a relationship with Christ, we ought to seek to imitate Him and extend the same compassion which He has shown us to others.

How has God shown compassion and mercy specifically to you?

Question  
# 4

The Bible outlines not only how the Lord has shown compassion and mercy to us, but also how we ought to show it to others. In [James 5:11](#), he describes “the perseverance of Job” during his many troubles in order to show how “the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.” From our finite human perspective, it may not seem compassionate to allow someone to go through such a severe and prolonged persecution which Job had to endure; nevertheless, the Lord was personally with His servant

throughout and offered him unrivaled compassion and mercy in the end. The Lord heard His servant's cry and provided the strength and stamina to endure though all else around him failed. Although we have limited insight into the motivation behind the violence and cannot see the outcome of the situation as the Lord can, we still should seek to act with love and compassion when we can without placing ourselves in harmful situations physically.

What times in your life have others shown compassion to you?

Question  
# 5

First, we should be willing to be there for people during difficult times in their lives, extending mercy while not enabling them to continue on a detrimental path of despair, bitterness, selfishness, or even sinfulness.

Compassion, therefore, may mean that we must be there in a such way that exhibits what society calls "tough love." Attending an event a few years ago, I unfortunately observed a young child of about four years old who acted violently in



*Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.*

*James 5:11*

such a way to use obscene language, threaten to kill other children, and mimic stabbing them with a knife. After talking to the adults in his life, it became apparent that they had allowed him to use a smart phone without any filters and without monitoring what he viewed online. In fact, these

## Instruct

adults related that they had tried to take the phone away from the child, but he threw such a tantrum that they relented and returned it to placate him. Instead of being there to instruct the child and teach him right from wrong, the parents failed to show compassion and enabled him to view these violent programs in order to keep him quiet.

Second, we should be willing to listen to people and lovingly guide them when possible by pointing them to the comfort and compassion that Christ offers through His sacrificial death. Although Jesus performed numerous signs and miracles, the greatest and most-compassionate gift that He offered was the gospel—the way that we can have eternal life through Him. For example, [Matthew 9:36](#) notes that Jesus “was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.” At which point He bid His disciples to “pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” ([Matt 9:37-38](#)). Jesus isn’t talking about a physical harvest, but a spiritual harvest in which His followers would take the gospel to the ends of the earth, offering hope to all who will accept it and extending mercy to all who need it. The only solution to violence in our world is the transformation brought about through the acceptance of the gospel and moving from death to life in Christ who becomes our primary focus and guide.

In what ways can we show compassion to others just as Christ has to us?

Question  
# 6

**RESTLESSNESS CAUSED BY VIOLENCE:**

The last section of this chapter concludes with a period of restlessness in which the judges have a low rate of retention and a short tenure of service. Patterned much like [Judges 10:1-5](#), we have a list of minor judges about whom very little is known except their place of residence, some scant information about their family heritage, their length of service, and their death.

After Jephthah, the brevity of the judges' reigns indicates a high rate of turnover—for no judge served



for more than a decade and at no point does the narrator acknowledge that the land had peace or rest. Because Israel has forsaken the Lord, the situation remains unstable and volatile—at their own making.

The first judge, **Ibzan** from **Bethlehem**, reigned only **seven years** before he **died** and **was buried** in the city of his birth (vv. 9-10). Although he **judged Israel** on behalf of the Lord, he aided in Israel's secularization by acquiring wives for his **thirty sons** to marry from outside of Israel and giving his **thirty daughters** away in marriage to non-Israelites; in doing so, he directly violated [Deuteronomy 7:3](#) and unintentionally pushed Israel to become more like the pagan nations around them. Even less is known about the second judge in this list, however, who **judged Israel** for **ten years**: we know his name, **Elon**; his tribe, Zebulun; and his place of burial, **Aijalon** in the territory of **Zebulun** (vv. 11-12). The final judge, **Abdon** from the city of Pirathon, served for a total of **eight years**; he had

## Instruct

a large family of **forty sons** and **thirty grandsons** who probably had some type of leadership position since they **rode on seventy donkeys** (vv. 13-14). This section concludes with a mundane announcement of his death and burial in **Pirathon in the land of Ephraim** (v. 15).

Consequently, this period of about twenty-five years was characterized by turmoil and uncertainty. Violence, especially like that which led to Israel's civil war, always creates an atmosphere of fear, uncertainty, and restlessness because one never knows how the other person will react to a particular situation. We have many euphemisms today which describe such volatility; we describe people as "hot heads," "flying off the handle," "on edge," or "triggered" because of the unpredictability of their actions. Even today, we live in an unstable society characterized by sin that often leads to violence. A word or phrase, an action or gesture, or even a suggestion or innuendo may set someone off and cause them to take matters into their own hands and enact vengeance upon others. We shouldn't live in fear, however; we must look to the Lord—for we can have comfort in Him. Despite all the degradation of this world, the wrongs that we have committed, and the wrongs that have been committed against us, God will continue to transform us from ones characterized by violence to those who extend compassion and forgiveness to others.

How does an unforgiving attitude and the sin of violence create uncertainty in the world?

Question  
# 7

Despite the threat of violence that this world often uses to resolve its problems, hope still abounds in Christ—for we have nothing to fear. Jesus plainly tells His disciples that we will be persecuted and threatened with violence because if the world hated Him it will also hate us. Even so, Jesus gives hope: “My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.’ But I will show you whom you should fear: ‘Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell!’” ([Luke 12:4-5](#)). Ultimately, we have nothing to fear because our real life awaits us in heaven; even if someone persecutes us here on earth and takes our life, we have something greater awaiting us. This doesn’t mean that we should be careless or ignorant by placing ourselves or our families in dangerous, life-threatening situations, but it means that we need to point others to Christ by the love and forgiveness that we have, imitating His character to the world.

We must seek to live a transformed life in which we have compassion for others characterized by the forgiveness we extend to them. As humans, bitterness, resentment, and retaliation come much easier than forgiveness, but with the aid of the Holy Spirit we can follow the model (Christ) who perfectly demonstrated what forgiveness is to us, we can have access through the means of prayer by seeking forgiveness from God and asking Him to enable us to forgive others, and we have the mandate to forgive repeatedly without reservation. When we live by God’s principles of forgiveness outlined in His Word, we will react with compassion rather than violence and others will see a stark transformation in our lives—something that only God can accomplish. Therefore, let us pray to be transformed from violence and vengeance to a life of compassion and forgiveness.

## ***Incorporate***

How has God transformed you to be more compassionate and merciful in your life?

In what ways can we demonstrate compassion in the church and to the world without enabling violence or sinfulness? Why is it important to seek guidance from the Holy Spirit when exhibiting compassion?

Is there anyone in your life currently against whom you have a grudge or even someone who harbors a grudge or resentment against you? How can you take steps to resolve that issue?

*May 13, 2018*



# *Be Transformed from Vileness to Vigilance*

## *Judges 13:1-25*

Focal Verse:

*"Again the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years."*

*Judges 13:5*

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## Introduce

Almost everywhere we look around DFW, we see construction projects—whether on freeways, in neighborhoods, or for businesses. Even immediately around the church, we’ve seen acres bulldozed and the foundation for roads and lots for houses outlined. Hopefully, all these projects have measured their dimensions precisely and used the right tools to ensure the roads and houses being constructed will link properly, be level, and will be perfectly square. Imagine, however, what would happen if they used defective tools by which to measure. Not only would they have a mess on their hands, but they would also build roadways that wouldn’t connect and houses that would likely crumble, having severe foundation and structural problems. No engineer or contractor, however, would ever intentionally use a defective tool to conduct precise measurements at the risk of being sued and going bankrupt for having such a lackadaisical and careless company.



However, why do we as humans tend to compare ourselves to other human beings who are morally defective and corrupt? When we look at others around us and proclaim, “I’m not as bad as he or she,” we are measuring our lives by a broken standard. We may look pretty good in comparison to the culture, but it gives us a false sense of hope. If the measurements in a new construction project are slightly off, for example, the newness of the build may mask any flaws, but nevertheless the flaws are still there.

## Introduce

Eventually, however, as time advances, the flaws will be exposed and become more glaring. Similarly, when we compare ourselves to other human beings, our faults remain whether we want to acknowledge them or not; in fact, by comparing ourselves to others, we attempt to mask our faults by showing that someone is worse than we are.

When we compare ourselves to a perfect standard, even our so-called little faults will become highly visible. For instance, Samson's parents in [Judges 13](#) lived in a culture that made them look pretty good; their culture was thoroughly inundated with evil. Although the couple was barren, God had chosen them to bear one who would begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines. Even though this couple looked good in comparison to their culture, when they encountered the Lord at the end of the story they realized how truly unrighteous and imperfect they were. Like everyone who has had an intimate encounter with the Lord, Samson's parents understood the magnitude of their sinfulness when they were in His presence. Thus, we must be transformed from the vileness of sin to vigilance in the Lord to become more like Him each day and less like the culture around us.

Key  
Question

What are the dangers with comparing ourselves to the culture?

### Judges 13:1-5

#### COMMUNICATION FOR A CALL:

Like many of the previous sections, this chapter **again** opens with an ominous indictment on **the children of Israel** who **did evil in the sight of the Lord** which resulted in Him allowing **the Philistines** to reign over them **for forty years** (v. 1). This period of forty years is the longest specified in the book of Judges over which a foreign nation dominated Israel and it directly corresponds to how sinful the people had become; as the book of Judges concludes, the nation, including its deliverer Samson, is in a downward spiral of depravity even though God continually delivered the people while working through imperfect judges. So far, the nation has abandoned or forsaken the Lord for foreign gods, intermarried and adopted pagan culture, engaged in highly selfish and immoral activities, and survived periods of civil war, but none of this woke the people and caused them to repent and serve the Lord. Instead, each generation grew progressively worse in its blazon sin against the Lord—and soon every person would do what is right in his or her own eyes ([Judg 17:6](#)).

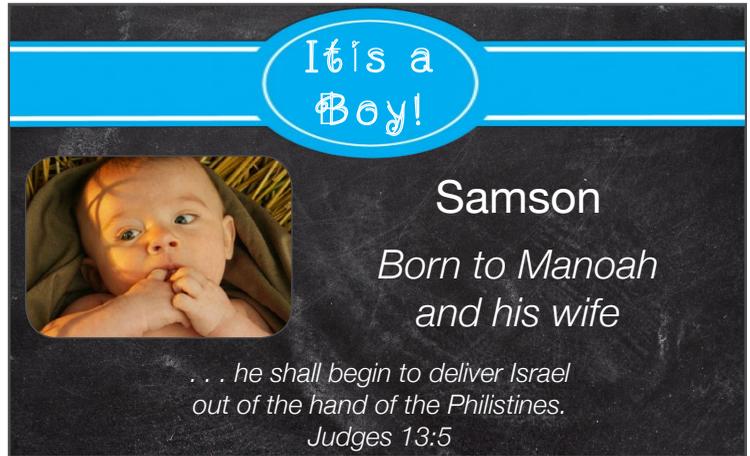
In what ways does our own society reflect the downward spiral as described in the book of Judges?

Question  
# 1

After this indictment against Israel, the chapter quickly turns to focus on the announcement of the birth of the deliverer; this birth narrative and call of Samson, is the longest, most-detailed in the book of Judges for any

## Instruct

deliverer. Like the prophet Jeremiah (see [Jer 1:5](#)), it demonstrates that life in God's eyes begins before conception since He has a plan for Samson to deliver the people of Israel from **the Philistines** prior to his birth or even of his mother being aware of her pregnancy. As the source of all life, the Lord enables **the wife of Manoah**, who remains unnamed throughout this narrative, to overcome being **barren** and to **conceive** a child who would deliver Israel (vv. 2-3). Just like He had with Sarah who lived before this **woman** and Hannah and Elizabeth who followed, God worked miraculously to fulfill His promise to provide, protect, deliver, and guide His people (see [Gen 17:9](#); [1 Sam 1:5](#); [Luke 1:7](#)). Through this birth, the Lord once again clearly demonstrates to both this couple and Israel as a whole that He remains in control and that their deliverance can only be attributed directly to Him—not their own human strength or ingenuity.



In what ways have you seen God work in your life that could only be attributed to Him?

Question  
# 2

In this communication for a call, **the angel of the Lord** addresses the **woman** to inform her that **she will conceive and bear a son**, to give her specific instructions to ensure a healthy pregnancy, and to describe the purpose to which the child will be called. After the initial announcement

of the woman's pregnancy, the messenger tells her **not to drink wine** or **similar drink** and to avoid eating **anything unclean** (v. 4). These instructions serve two purposes. First, they demonstrate the woman's willingness to follow instructions and obey the Lord. Second, they show God's concern for His people and the reason why He gives us boundaries to follow. He doesn't merely create rules for the sake of having them or to kill our fun and joy, but He does so for our own benefit and protection. In this case, these instructions to **the woman** indicate the Lord's desire to ensure both the health of the mother and the unborn child during pregnancy. Based on modern research, scientific studies have shown the harmful effects of consuming alcohol or certain types of foods during pregnancy; therefore, the instructions which the Lord gives show how much He truly loves us and wants us to have the most abundant life possible.

### ***In Reference***



*For further information, access the U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on Alcohol Use in Pregnancy by visiting [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) which contains the most-recent [report from March 11, 2005](#). The site also contains official guidelines for reducing birth defects by avoiding the consumption of certain foods.*

After detailing the instructions to **the woman**, **the angel of the Lord** describes the purpose of the child and then outlines further instructions for him (v. 5). The **son**, whom she will **conceive**, will **begin to deliver Israel** from **the hand of the Philistines**. Curiously, here it only suggests that the child will **begin to deliver Israel** because the total annihilation of **the**

## Instruct

**Philistines** won't occur until the reign of David. The Lord also gives specific instructions for both the parents and the child to follow; he will be dedicated as a **Nazirite** which means that **no razor shall touch his head**. [Numbers 6:1-8](#) also details further instructions for the Nazirites where the Lord forbids them from drinking alcohol or eating anything produced by the grapevine or from becoming defiled by being near any corpse. The purpose of this **Nazirite** vow, therefore, was to demonstrate devotion to the Lord, recognizing their call to a specific task. Although called to a specific task, only at times did Samson demonstrate faithfulness and devotion to the Lord because he was often more conspicuously devoted to the pursuit of women and pleasure than to the will of the Lord.



### In-Depth Information



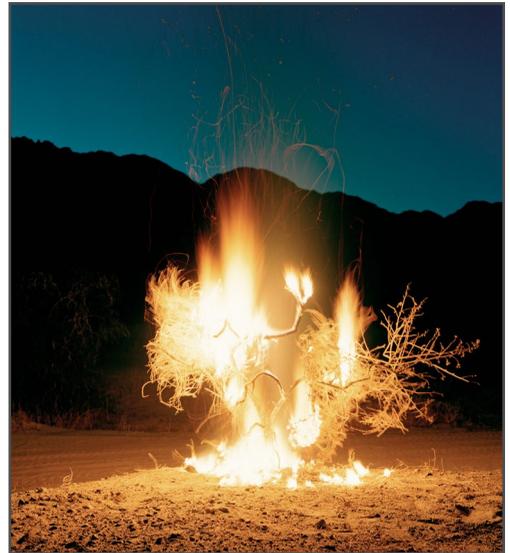
The verb from which we derive **Nazirite**, *nazir*, means “to dedicate or consecrate” oneself. When we consecrate ourselves, therefore, we must realize that we have been set apart for a specific purpose and we must dedicate ourselves to following the Lord who will enable us to fulfill that purpose to which He has called us.

To what specific task has God called you in His church?

Question  
# 3

**CONSULTATION WITH THE LORD:**

Immediately, **the woman** found **her husband** and began recounting the details of this encounter with the divine messenger by explaining that **a man of God**, as indicated by his appearance, had come to visit her. She further notes that she didn't **ask where he was from** nor did he tell her **his name** (v. 6). In other words, she affirms to **her husband** that she believed the messenger and took him at his word without questioning his truthfulness or the message's validity. In the Ancient Near East, to know someone's **name** and lineage (i.e. **where they are from**) means that one has a personal relationship with them and knows something about their character and reputation; in this couple's case, therefore, it serves to help them determine if the messenger exercises integrity and if his message is indeed true. To help us understand this concept, we can point to another well-known example when Moses encountered the Lord at the burning bush; he posed this same type of question: "Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?" ([Exod 3:13](#)). Similar to Manoah, whom we will study shortly, Moses wanted to verify the nature of his call and demonstrate the integrity and faithfulness of the One who had called him by relating His **name** to the people.



## Instruct

In a brief statement to her husband, **Manoah, the woman** summarizes the content of the message she had received (v. 7). She accurately lists three basic tenets which **the angel of the Lord** had given her: 1) she will **conceive and bear a son**, 2) she must exercise caution in what she eats and drinks, and 3) **the child** will be dedicated as a **Nazirite** from birth to **death**. Manoah then responds by praying to the Lord for further clarification, asking Him to send the **man of God** again so that he **may teach** them **what** they should **do for the child** (v. 8). At this point, Manoah's prayer doesn't demean his wife or show distrust in her story, but it demonstrates how the Lord communicates with both partners in a marriage (see also [Matt 1:19-21](#); [Luke 1:26-38](#)). When God calls a couple to a specific task, He will confirm His plan to both the husband and wife; He will never speak to one partner and not the other because this would create instability and uncertainty in the relationship.



Because marriage constitutes a partnership centered in Christ, both spouses must take time to seek God and listen to His response so that He can clarify His instructions for the family as a whole; many times, however, we allow personal preferences and pride to inform our decisions rather than relying wholly on the Lord. For example, God will never cause division in the family and call one spouse to serve in one church and the other to serve in another; He will never cause

competition which leads to strife over big decisions—whether finances, retirement, buying large items like homes and automobiles, or even how to discipline children. When we truly seek the Lord through prayer and study of His Word, He will reveal to us the exact course in life He desires for us to take; however, we must make sure that we *truly* take the time to seek Him, listen to what He has said, and apply it in our lives.

Why is it important that we recognize that God will confirm His plan to both a husband and wife? What should we do when God hasn't yet confirmed His plan to both spouses?

Question  
# 4

God fulfilled Manoah's request and sent the messenger once again to his wife as she sat in a **field**, but he was still **not with her** (v. 9). This time **the woman ran** quickly to inform **her husband** that the divine visitor she had previously met had returned (v. 10). **Following** her back to the **field**, Manoah addressed the messenger with a simple question first: **Are you the man who spoke to this woman** (v. 11)? To which the messenger curtly replied, "**I am.**" After corroborating his wife's claims about the visitor, Manoah expressed his hope that the messenger's **words** would **come to pass** and then he asked two specific questions regarding the child (v. 12). First, he asks about the manner in which the child should live; in other words, he is seeking clarification about the Nazirite vow by which the Lord has called him to live. The NKJV translates the phrase literally: **What will be the boy's rule of life?** To put it in more modern English, Manoah wants to know the standard by which the boy should be raised—i.e. the **Nazirite** vow in which **no razor** should **touch his head** (see v. 5). The second question, on the other hand, is much simpler to understand: to what **work** or for what purpose has the child been called? Again, this goes

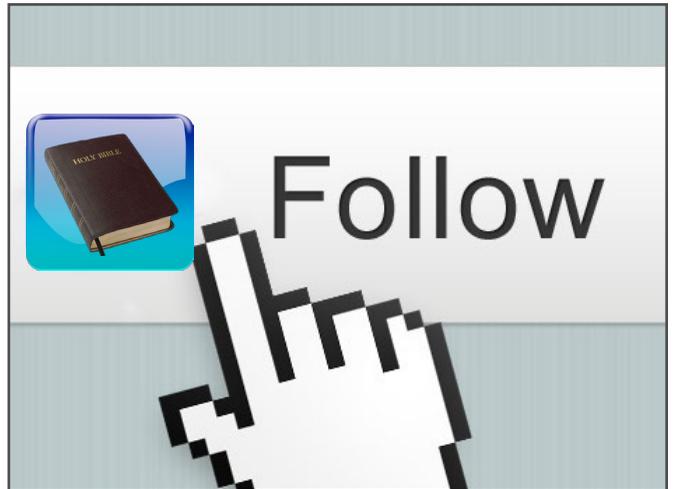
back to the original conversation his wife had with the messenger in which he reveals that **the boy will begin to deliver Israel** from oppression by **the Philistines**.

Why does God not become angry when we ask questions for clarification as opposed to questions that test Him?

Question  
# 5

Although the messenger doesn't answer these two questions directly, he makes a sweeping statement that confirms everything he has already told **the woman** (v. 13). He first focuses on the dietary restrictions that he had given her and bids her to **be careful** to follow what he has **said**. In the end, however, **the angel of the Lord** emphasizes to Manoah that she should follow **all that he commanded her to observe**—including

the manner in which the child should be raised according to the Nazirite custom and his call as a deliverer of Israel (v. 14). When the Lord gives us specific directives by which to live, we too ought to be careful to follow



them explicitly. As we have seen, He intends His commands to better our lives and to guide us in righteousness to fulfill His purpose through us; however, if we need clarification, He will always readily answer our questions and equip us for the task to which He has called us.

**CONFIRMATION TO THE COUPLE:**

Similar to what Gideon had done years earlier (see [Judg 6:17-23](#)), Manoah politely asks the visitor to stay while he prepares a meal of a **young goat** to celebrate this tremendous news that he has been given (v. 15). To Manoah's generous display of hospitality, **the angel of the Lord** agrees to stay, but declines to **eat the food** (v. 16). To refocus him so that he ascribes proper credit to where it is truly due, the messenger tells Manoah that **if** he should **offer a burnt offering** he must **offer it to the Lord** (v. 16). In a subtle way, the messenger directs Manoah to worship the Lord and praise Him for this wonderful provision of a child; Manoah, however, still did not understand the source of the message and, as the narrator points out, he had not yet discerned he was speaking with **the angel of the Lord**. Even though Manoah had prayed to the Lord (see v. 8), he had not yet grasped the magnitude of the situation and the divine nature of the prophecy and promise. Instead, he continued to view the announcement from a human perspective by trying to figure out the character and qualification of the messenger.

For this reason, he asks the **name** of the visitor so that they may **honor him** when what he has said comes true (v. 17). As we learned earlier, knowing someone's name indicates personal knowledge of their character and background, so this represents an attempt by Manoah to determine if this messenger is actually qualified to make such a statement. Without realizing the message is directly from God,



## Instruct

Manoah would willingly ascribe **honor** and give praise to the messenger rather than the Lord. Although the *messenger* speaks directly on behalf of the Lord, Manoah had not yet understood fully to whom he spoke, so it demonstrates his willingness to misappropriate his worship—whereas **the angel of the Lord** attempts to focus him solely on the Lord.

When asked his name, the messenger responded with a question: **why do you ask my name seeing that it is wonderful** (v. 18)? The word translated **wonderful** by most translations or secret by the KJV actually means it is incomprehensible—it is too wonderful or great for Manoah to understand. Undoubtedly, this refers to the divine name given to Moses at the burning bush ([Exod 3:14](#)); in our finite mind, the Lord's holiness, righteousness, graciousness, and wisdom is too great for us to grasp—we can only just begin to understand or comprehend the magnitude of His character which He has revealed to us. Then, Manoah took **the goat** along with **a grain offering** and placed it upon a **rock**, offering **it to the Lord** (v. 19). As with Gideon (see [Judg 6:21](#)), fire consumed the offering and **the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame** and disappeared (vv. 20-21). At this point, the couple recognized it was **the angel of the Lord** and they **fell upon the ground** in a posture of worship, yet they were seized with fear.



We can learn a valuable lesson from Manoah's experience. When witnessing to others, we must both live righteously and verbally share

the gospel. Many people will use the fact that they live a good life in obedience to the Lord as an excuse not to share the gospel. Even if we live a transformed life of which other people take note, how will they know that Christ is the One who has transformed us if we do not tell them? According to the perspective of the world, we can “transform” ourselves through sheer determination, hard work, and knowledge, but we as Christians know that any so-called transformation apart from Christ still leads to destruction because it’s not permanent. Therefore, just as **the angel of the Lord** directed Manoah to offer praise to the Lord, we also ought to share verbally with others the gospel of Jesus Christ which has the power to transform completely and permanently; let us not be slack in our duties in the way that we live and how that we share the gospel verbally.

Why is it important to point people to Christ and share it verbally in addition to living righteously?

Question  
# 6

### Judges 13:22-25

#### CONCERN BY THE COUPLE:

Just as Gideon did when he recognized the divine origin of the messenger (see [Judg 6:22-23](#)), Manoah exclaims to his wife that they shall surely die because they have seen God (v. 22). Manoah’s wife tries to reassure him logically by reminding him that the Lord wouldn’t have accepted their offering nor would He have recruited them for such a task as bearing a child who would begin to deliver Israel if He had simply desired to kill them (v. 23). Because the Lord has a plan for them, He would not simply act arbitrarily and kill them, but He would fulfill that

## Instruct

which He has said. Consequently, the chapter closes with the birth of a child whom they named **Samson** and as the **child grew the Lord blessed him** (v. 24). Next week, we will see how **the Spirit of the Lord began to move upon him at Mahaneh Dan** (v. 25). Therefore, we will see the Lord's promise through this divine messenger come to fruition as He begins to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines.

When Manoah realized the messenger had come on behalf of the Lord, he began to compare himself to the Lord rather than man as he evaluated his response to the situation. When we compare this couple

to the culture around them at that time, they seem like moral, upstanding people who are religious and faithful. As a couple, they showed great hospitality and politeness to their visitor, they believed what he had told them, and they sought clarification and



confirmation through prayer. Outwardly, they appeared to be great people; when they realized that they had been in the presence of the Lord as signified by this messenger, however, they began to comprehend how vile, unrighteous, and unworthy they truly were. No longer did they see themselves in terms of the culture around them, but they saw themselves in terms of the perfectly holy standard who had called them to a specific purpose. We too need to evaluate ourselves in terms of the perfect standard of the Lord rather than the imperfect standard of the culture around us; when we do, we will see how utterly short we have

fallen and how utterly dependent upon the guidance of the Lord we ought to be.

How can we know God's standard for our lives? Why is it important that we evaluate ourselves according to the Lord standards and not the culture?

Question  
# 7

## *Inspire*

Whether we have a new home, older home, or even live in an apartment, we will see imperfection in the construction. We often try to hide blemishes or flaws, but in reality they are still there when we even try to mask them. When trying to hang a picture with two separate hooks on the back, I unfortunately measured incorrectly and miscalculated the space, so the hooks on the frame and the wall anchors did not match. I re-measured the hooks on the frame afresh and started the process again, but imagine if I tried to take a shortcut and use the previously misplaced anchor as a guide. I would have had a mess on my hands with multiple holes in my drywall and a picture that would be hung askew. After the first attempt, I removed the anchor, filled the hole with putty, and repainted it with the same color, but the blemish was still there behind the painting and upon close inspection could still be seen.

In a similar way, the secular culture presents an inaccurate standard by which to measure our lives. The world, for example, attempts to mask its flaws by comparing themselves to an imperfect standard so that they can look better. As Christians, many of us attempt to do the same; however, we ought to compare ourselves to the perfect standard—not the world around us—so that we can ascertain a true measurement of our maturation in

## ***Inspire***

Christ. When we compare ourselves to Christ, we will see how truly short that we fall and we will recognize the need to rely upon Him to transform us from the vile culture around us to being vigilant in our actions so that they glorify Him.

## ***Incorporate***

How has God called you to be devoted wholly unto Him and to serve Him specifically through this church?

## ***Incorporate***

How would you describe yourself in comparison to the Lord? What are some areas in which you have seen the Lord transform your life? What are some areas in which you still need to be transformed?

*May 20, 2018*



*Be Transformed from  
Vitriol (Anger) to Virtue  
Judges 14:1-19*

Focal Verse:

*“... So his anger was aroused, and he went back up to his father’s house.”*

Judges 14:19

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## Introduce

Several years ago, a church underwent a 1.5-million-dollar renovation to repair and update its facilities built in the 1950s. The business meeting to discuss the funding and approve the final architectural plans began like any other at first, but it soon turned into a battle for the ages as the plans and color schemes were scrutinized. Although actual physical blows were never exchanged, several people came close as they stormed from the meeting with great animosity and anger because they didn't get what they wanted. The most-heated debate at the time occurred over the removal of the carpet from between the pews and the installation of tile—which would be easier to clean and maintain, giving the sanctuary a more modern look. The aisles, however, would still have beautiful deep-red carpet with a bronze trim to transition to the tile. Something that should have been a joyous occasion to give glory to the Lord had become the center of a knock-down, drag-out fight based on human perspectives and preferences.



After several months, the renovations were completed and the beautiful sanctuary was dedicated to the Lord—despite the contentious bickering. Yet, little aspects, such as the carpet, lighting, and design of the choir loft, set people off more than the 1.5-million price tag. Even after the building's completion, members still fought over the renovations to the extent that one choir member vociferously demanded that the new walls be

## Introduce

demolished and the old doorways to the choir loft re-installed because she didn't like entering the choir from the front of the platform. Overall, however, something that should have been used to glorify the Lord had now become something that divided His body and created animosity and hatred among its many members. Yet, God still works despite the foolish and sinful things that we do to transform us into His image so that He can minister to others around us.

As we begin to study Samson's life, we will see how the Lord worked through him despite his shortcomings and sinfulness to begin delivering Israel from the Philistines. God is never to be implicated in Samson's sinfulness as if He inspired or led him to do these things—but He worked in a mighty way even despite this disobedience and degradation. Most of the things in which Samson engages are contrary to God's Word, such as his intermarriage with a Philistine, his drunken bachelor party, and his utter anger expressed in [chapter 14](#), but in the end God still transforms Samson into a deliverer used by Him. As we study this chapter, we must realize that Samson needed to be transformed from vitriol (anger) to virtue in his service to the Lord; in the same way, we must seek to allow the Lord to transform us into virtuous people whom He can use for His glory.

### Key Question

Why should we seek to live virtuously? What virtues should we display in our lives?

#### **GOD WORKS DESPITE SAMSON'S DISTRACTION:**

Although Samson had extraordinary physical strength given to him by the Lord, he had tremendous character flaws that often distracted him and caused him to engage in sinful activities contrary to God's Word. In the very first verse in which we meet Samson, we see his most prominent character flaw: his lust for women. In fact, this flaw will manifest itself throughout his life as seen by his visit to a prostitute ([16:1](#)) and it will ultimately lead to his downfall through his sordid relationship with Delilah ([16:4](#)). Here, in this context, we first observe **Samson in Timnah** where he **saw** a **Philistine woman** who caught his attention (v. 1). To us, this may sound innocent and harmless based on our modern culture, but when we closely examine the text we will notice two major problems with this relationship from the beginning: 1) we see how Samson focuses his attention upon the woman's physical appearance and not the substance of her character or her family's character and 2) this relationship violates the Lord's command for Israel not to intermarry with the pagan cultures around them (see [Deut 7:1-5](#)).

Throughout the first three verses, the emphasis lies upon Samson's physical attraction to this **woman** as indicated by the preponderance of expressions related to "sight." After *seeing* her **in Timnah**, he returns to his parent's house where he declares that he *has seen a woman* and then demands that they arrange their marriage (v. 2). Samson's parents, however, try to dissuade him from marrying a Philistine by suggesting that he can find someone from their own tribe—surely, they feel, he can

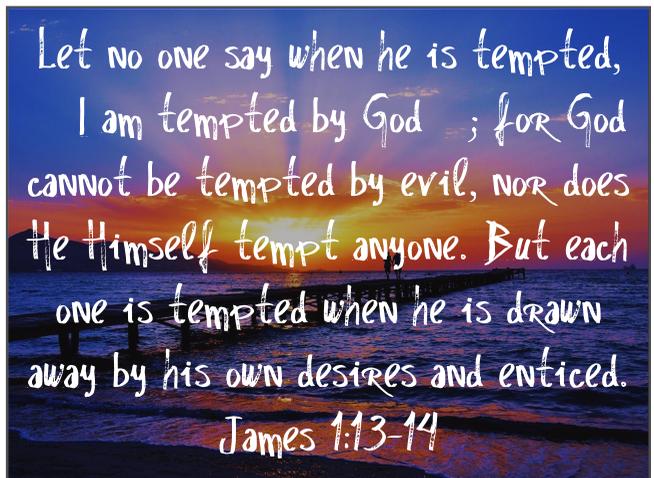
## Instruct

find someone **among the daughters of their brethren** rather than **the uncircumcised Philistines** (v. 3). Again, Samson overrules them because he is infatuated with this woman's physical appearance, so he tells **his father** to **get her** as a wife **for him** because **she pleases him well**. The phrase "**she pleases me well**" softens the meaning of the original text which literally translates as "she is pleasing or right to my eyes"; in other words, Samson finds her attractive. By merely looking at the physical, Samson became distracted from the spiritual pitfall that would inevitably occur when the two cultures united in marriage—which is also symptomatic of Israel as a whole who had adopted the worship of foreign gods in place of the Lord.

What are some things you pursue in your life that could easily distract your relationship with the Lord if you're not careful?

Question  
# 1

Not only was Samson distracted by the physical appearance of this **woman**, but he also outrightly disobeyed the Lord's command to refrain from intermarriage with pagan cultures (see [Judg 3:6-8](#)). Although verse 4 states that Samson's parents **did not know it was of the Lord** who was **seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines**, God did not inspire Samson to act contrary to His Word. In fact, God



never tempts us nor does He ever put it into our heart to do anything sinful that violates His Word ([Jas 1:13-14](#)). To state that the Lord caused Samson to desire this union or inspired him to act sinfully misreads and misunderstands the context. On his own, Samson decided in his heart to pursue marriage with this **woman**; God, however, used this as an **occasion** or opportunity to begin delivering His people from the hand of the **Philistines**. Therefore, this statement proclaims that despite the evil that Samson did in the sight of the Lord He still used it to accomplish His plan.

Why can God not be implicated or held responsible for our sin or the choices that we make? How would you explain this concept to the world who may blame God?

Question  
# 2

To help us further understand the context of this statement, we should turn to the story of Joseph when his brothers sought opportunity to kill him, but were persuaded by their eldest brother Reuben to sell him into slavery instead. Most of us know how the story ends; the Lord used Joseph and raised him to the second-highest position in all of Egypt to oversee preparation for a seven-year famine. After being reunited with his brothers during the famine and making provision for them, Joseph declared, "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive" ([Gen 50:20](#)). The Lord, therefore, cannot be implicated in the evil perpetrated by Joseph's brothers, but He did use their evil actions as an **occasion** to provide for the people whom He had called and to rescue them from certain death. In the same way, God used Samson despite his sinful disposition to begin delivering Israel. Like Samson, this does not give us the right to sin

## Instruct

intentionally, knowing that God will make the best of a bad situation, but rather it demonstrates God's sovereignty and ability to use us even when we make mistakes. We should seek to live a life of integrity and virtue in accordance with the Holy Spirit's guidance so that He may use us even more effectively; however, if we continue to sin, as Samson learned, God's judgment will result (see [Judg 16:20](#)).

Why should we refrain from sin even though God will forgive us and can still use our mistakes to accomplish His will?

Question  
# 3

## Judges 14:5-14

### ***GOD WORKS DESPITE SAMSON'S DISOBEDIENCE:***

As Samson and his parents traveled **to Timnah** to arrange for his marriage to this woman, a **young lion** suddenly **came** to attack **him** (v. 5). We are not told whether Samson has gone ahead of his parents or stayed behind them because they apparently did not witness this event, for the text recounts that **he did not tell them what he had done** (v. 6). Miraculously, empowered by **the Spirit of the Lord**, Samson tore **the lion apart** even **though** he had no weapon of any kind **in his hand**. As if nothing had happened, Samson continued his journey to **Timnah** where he met and **talked with the woman**; once again, the narrator emphasizes Samson's strong physical attraction to her as he describes



her as being “pleasing or right in his eyes” (v. 7). At times throughout the next three chapters, Samson acts as if he is ignorant and unaware of the Lord’s presence in his life. Even though God has worked **mightily** through him to avert disaster and kill this predatory **lion**, Samson never acknowledges Him and continues to live a life contradictory to the commands that he has been given.

In what ways have you seen God working in your life? How do you acknowledge His presence when He has worked through you?

Question  
# 4

As we continue to read in this section, we will encounter more areas in Samson’s life in which he expresses disregard and disobedience to the commands that the Lord had given him. For example, the Lord had expressly told him and his parents that he should follow the code of ethics of the Nazirite whereby he should be set apart and devoted to the service of the Lord. According to the prescribed guidelines that God had outlined to Moses, the Nazirite was to avoid being defiled by coming into contact with any corpse (see [Num 6:6-7](#)). After a while, Samson returned **to Timnah to get** his finance, so he stopped to see **the carcass** or remains of **the lion** he had killed earlier (v. 8). The word translated **carcass** literally means “the ruin” which is meant to heighten the fact of the decay and defilement that Samson, a Nazirite, was experiencing by coming into contact with the corpse. In the remains of **the lion**, he found that **a swarm of bees** had produced **honey**; defiling himself even more, he scooped some of it into **his hands** and **went along eating** it (v. 9). When he returned home, he also **gave some** of it to his parents, but he did not reveal that the **honey** had come from **the carcass of the lion**. Coming from such a putrid and

## Instruct

rotten source, it would also defile his parents and would have also revealed his violation of the Nazirite vow by which he had been raised, so he attempted to conceal it from them.

When we are living according to God's standards and are walking as children of the light, why do we never need to keep things a secret?

Question  
# 5

Samson's father then traveled to Timnah to be with the engaged couple and where Samson was also giving **a feast** (v. 10). The Hebrew word translated **feast** actually signifies a "seven-day" bachelor-like celebration held at the home of the bride's parents which involved consuming huge quantities of alcohol.\* Once again, this implies that Samson had completely ignored the Lord's calling to follow the Nazirite customs since he was forbidden to drink wine or any similar strong alcoholic drink in accordance with Philistine custom (see [Num 6:3-4](#)). Despite Samson's disobedience to the Lord, the party continued as the Philistines sent **thirty** men to accompany him (v. 11). Unfortunately, we know nothing about these men and it's unnecessary to speculate about why the community felt the need to send them to the party; all we know from the text is that Samson engages them in a contest to solve a **riddle** that he had **posed** (v. 12)—further demonstrating his arrogance and pride.

## In Reference



*Daniel I. Block, Judges, Ruth, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999), p. 431.*

To the **thirty** Philistines who had come, Samson made a bet that **if** they could **solve** and **explain the riddle within seven days of the feast** he would **give** them **thirty linen garments** and **changes of clothing** (v. 12). If these men couldn't **explain** it, then they would **give** him the same in return (v. 13). After they accepted the challenge, Samson posed a **riddle** about his exploits with **the lion** he encountered; the first two lines of each stanza refer to **the lion (out of the eater / out of the strong)** and the second two lines refer to the **honey (something to eat / something sweet)**.

Because **bees** ordinarily do not use a lion's **carcass** as their hive, it indicates that the Lord had done something miraculous; therefore, the men **could not** explain the **riddle** (v. 14). Despite the miraculous work the Lord



had performed, however, the **riddle** and nature of the bet focused on Samson rather than the Spirit's mighty work through him.

As humans, the temptation is always great for us to become self-centered and focus solely on what we want rather than recognizing the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and surrendering completely to His leadership ([1 Thess 5:19](#)). By ignoring the work of the Spirit, like Samson, we often find ourselves in dire predicaments of our own making, pushing us further from the Lord rather than drawing us closer. Samson continues this downward spiral in his life even though the Spirit empowers him physically to do great feats of strength, but in the end his immoral character catches up with him and causes his downfall. As believers, we

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ought to strive to be effective vessels whom the Lord can use in a way that helps us mature in our character while at the same time brings Him glory through the things He accomplishes through us. Although God worked mightily through Samson, imagine how much more effective he would have been had he devoted himself to the service of the Lord instead of his own futile pursuit of lust, gambling, and vengeance.

In what ways can we “quench” the work of the Spirit in our lives (see 1 Thess 5:19)?

Question  
# 6

## Judges 14:15-19

### ***GOD WORKS DESPITE SAMSON'S DEGRADATION:***

Anger, animosity, and hatred abound in the attempt to resolve the **riddle**. On **the seventh day**, the men who had not yet solved it harassed **Samson's wife** so that they could learn the answer; threatening her, they demanded that she **entice** her **husband** to reveal the answer or they would **burn down her father's house** (v. 15). Further, they preyed upon her loyalties as a Philistine woman by trying to make her feel guilty, claiming that she had **invited** them to the party to defraud them and **take** their things. Consequently, this places the woman in a bind by creating both hardship in her marriage and animosity toward her **husband** as well as her community. In her attempt to placate the **thirty** Philistine men, she turns on her husband and begins nagging him for the answer ([Prov 21:9; 25:4](#)). For **seven days** during which **the feast** lasted, she continually **wept** and nagged him, claiming that he **hated** her and **did not love** her because he would **not explain the riddle** (vv. 16-17).

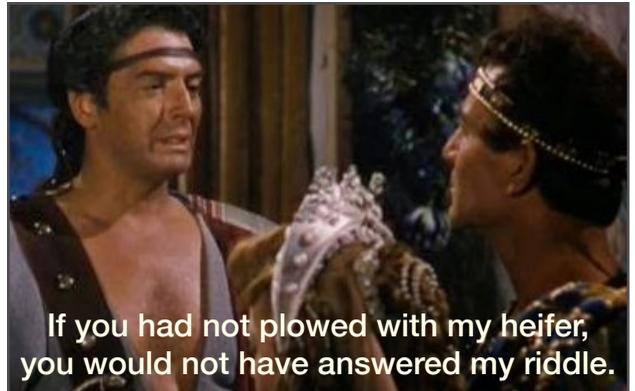
Finally, Samson relented and revealed the answer to the riddle because **she had pressed him so much.**

How can the culture and even extended family cause anger and bitterness in a marriage? How can we overcome this type of frustration in marriage?

Question  
# 7

On the **seventh day**, the men returned to Samson with the answer to **the riddle** (v. 18). Knowing they had cheated by pressuring his wife to extort the answer from him, Samson became irate—first with his wife and second with the **thirty** men. In **anger**, Samson insulted his wife and accused the men explicitly of cheating.

In metaphorical language, he asserted that they **would not have solved his riddle if they had not plowed with his heifer.** The phrase **plowed with my heifer** is as offensive in Hebrew to his wife



as it would be in modern English and it created deep division and strife between the couple which we will see magnified in the beginning of the next chapter which we will study next week (see [14:20](#)). In addition, he raged against the Philistines and **killed thirty of their men**, taking their garments and giving them to the men **who had solved the riddle** (v. 19). Seething with **anger**, he returned to his father's house and plotted revenge upon the people who had wronged him ([Judg 15:7](#)).

Again, Samson acts sinfully on his own by gambling frivolously, failing to lead his home in a godly manner, and enacting murderous revenge upon the Philistines; moreover, he brought this calamity upon himself by

## Instruct

burning with unrighteous **anger**. Despite Samson's sinful degradation, **the Spirit of the Lord** uses this as an opportunity to move against the oppressive Philistines and begin to deliver Israel. The Bible clearly instructs us to deal with our anger in a constructive way, not leaving it unresolved and festering until we explode. Quoting [Psalm 4:4](#), Paul writes, "Be angry, and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your wrath." In its original context in Psalm 4:4, David clarifies about how we should deal with our anger; he specifies that we should "meditate within [our] heart and on [our] bed, and be still." In other words, we need to first take time to calm down and evaluate the situation lest we respond in anger. While reflecting, we should seek the Lord and allow Him to guide our actions and our response ([Psalm 4:5](#)). Finally, we must be ready to extend forgiveness and move forward even if the other party involved never asks for it or even apologizes ([Eph 4:32](#)). When we do, the Lord will transform us from vitriol (anger) to virtue.

What are godly ways in which we can deal with hurt, resentment, and even anger?

Question  
# 8

## Inspire

Other than perhaps forms of sexual immorality, the sin of anger dominates our society and directly contributes to the increase in fractured homes as well as unrestrained violence as we saw in week one's lesson this month. Many in our society can no longer control their emotions and have no understanding about how they should appropriately deal with their anger in large part due to social media in which people can post and say

almost anything without facing the consequences of how it hurts others by seeing their reaction in person. Although social media and texting have tremendous usefulness, they have also helped to contribute to our society's lack of personal etiquette and decorum when dealing with contentious issues. By saying something online rather than in person, one can simply speak angrily or hatefully to a person and then block them; others will simply continue to agitate because they don't see the person face to face on the other end of a computer or phone screen. Because we have become increasingly isolated and self-centered in our society, anger can often be wrongly "justified" and many people lack the social skills to rectify the situation in an appropriate manner.

The ultimate reason for anger is rooted sinfulness and must be attributed to mankind's degradation more than any other thing; therefore, we must have a biblical response to deal with our emotions, especially anger. Some very basic principles which we may overlook can help us in this endeavor. First, we must confess our sin and seek forgiveness from the Lord so that we can be in right standing with Him; if we aren't in right standing with the Lord ourselves, how can we be in right standing with others without becoming angry? Second, we must see others as Christ sees them—not ignoring or accepting their sin, but seeing them as someone who needs a relationship with the Savior just like we do. Third, we need to be quick to listen and slow to speak as well as to pass judgment on a situation; we need to pray and ask the Lord for discernment and wisdom, waiting for all the facts to arise in a case before jumping to conclusions. Finally, we need to be willing to forgive and ask for forgiveness at all times (we will study

## ***Inspire***

this more next week). When we apply these principles in our lives, we can be transformed from vitriol (anger) to virtue in the Lord so that He can more effectively use us to accomplish that to which He has called us.

## ***Incorporate***

What are some things in your life whether at home, at work, in the church, or in the community that make you angry or have made you angry? List them and then spend time in prayer asking the Lord to help you overcome your anger in a godly way.

## ***Incorporate***

How does viewing a situation through the eyes of Christ help us to overcome our anger?

*May 27, 2018*



*Be Transformed from  
Vengeance to Forgiveness*  
*Judges 14:20-15:20*

Focal Verse:

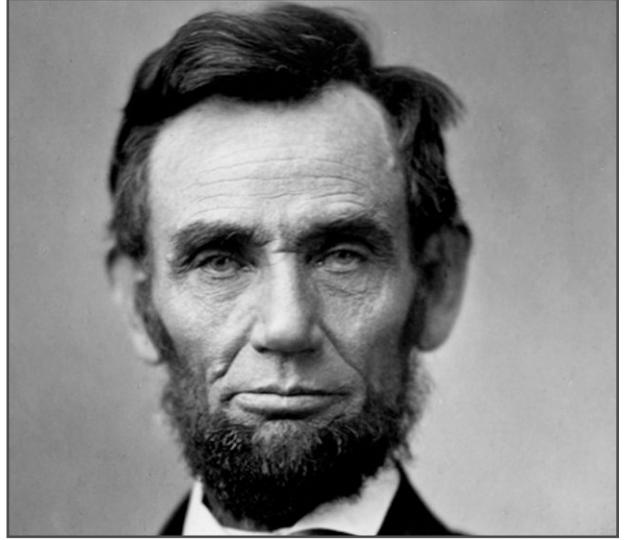
*"Samson said to them, 'Since you would do a thing like this, I will surely take revenge on you, and after that I will cease.'"*

*Judges 15:7*

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## Introduce

Before Abraham Lincoln became our sixteenth president, he practiced law at a firm in Springfield, Illinois with his partner William Herndon. Having grown up in rural areas of the ever-expanding American frontier, Lincoln's knowledge reflected the practicality of his upbringing and the ingenuity of his ability to solve problems with his folksy wisdom. While practicing law in Springfield, Lincoln recalled one case in which a lender bent on revenge hired him to sue another "poor attorney for \$2.50."\* Unfortunately, this lawyer lived in abject poverty without a penny to his name, but Lincoln could not dissuade the lender from attempting to sue the lawyer and exact his revenge. In fact, he even warned the lender: "You can make nothing out of him, and it will cost you a good deal more than the debt to bring suit." Blinded by his need for revenge, the lender continued to pursue the case against the poor lawyer.



Because he could not convince his client to drop the suit, Lincoln charged him a ten-dollar fee which he required prior to prosecuting the case; the lender gladly and expediently paid him the ten dollars—to settle a \$2.50 debt! Upon receiving the money, Lincoln found the poor lawyer and summoned him to appear in court—but on the way to court, he gave him half of the ten-dollar fee he had received from the lender. Returning to his office to meet with the lender, Lincoln had a smile on his face as he reported that the lawyer "confessed . . . and paid the bill"; the lender's debt

## Introduce

had been fully settled. Just as Lincoln had predicted, the lender's unwillingness to forgive the debt and insistence on enacting revenge in the end actually cost him much more. Instead of losing \$2.50, the suit cost the lender \$7.50!

In the same way, when we harbor bitterness and seek revenge in our lives, it costs us much more than when we are willing to forgive. In [Judges 15](#), we see unfettered violence, unrestrained revenge, and an unwillingness to forgive in all the parties involved. The Philistines enact vengeance upon Samson's ex-wife and her father, Samson lashes out at the Philistines, and the people of Judah become enraged at Samson because the Philistines have further oppressed them because of what Samson had done to them. This certainly sounds like a soap opera with all the interconnected plots and twists and turns. Yet, the reality is that all the bitterness and unwillingness to forgive leads to downfall and destruction for the individuals involved; therefore, we must seek to be transformed from vengeance to forgiveness in the Lord so that revenge doesn't end up costing us more in the long run as it did Samson and Lincoln's client.

### Key Question

Why should we be willing to forgive others as well as to ask for forgiveness when we have wronged them?

## In Reference



*"Abe" Lincoln's Yarns and Stories: A Complete Collection of the Funny and Witty Anecdotes that made Lincoln Famous," with an introduction by Alexander K. McClure (Philadelphia: Henry Neil, 1901), p. 325-326.*

## Judges 14:20-15:8

### **THE MOTIVE OF REVENGE:**

The violent vengeance that predominates chapter 15 really stems from one action that concludes chapter 14: **Samson's wife** had been given to his friend who served as **the best man** at their wedding (v. 20). From last week's lesson, we recall that Samson insulted his wife and stormed off to his father's house after she had revealed the answer for his riddle to the thirty Philistines. After he had cooled off somewhat, Samson returned to **his wife** with **a young goat**, perhaps as a peace offering, but **her father** would not allow him to visit her in **her room** (v. 1). Apparently, when Samson left in such a rage after killing thirty Philistines, the **father** thought that he **thoroughly hated** his daughter and intended to break off the marriage (v. 2). Consequently, he gave her to Samson's **companion** (i.e. best man) as a consolation for her being abandoned during the first week of marriage. When the father attempts to placate Samson and rectify the situation by offering her younger sister to him whom he claims is better, that is prettier, it actually infuriates Samson even more. Therefore, to justify his anger, Samson exclaims that he shall **be blameless**—he shall no longer be responsible for his actions against **the Philistines** (v. 3).

Why is Samson's reasoning that he will be blameless for his actions flawed?

Question  
# 1

To seek revenge, Samson plots to torch the Philistines' **wheat** crop at **harvest** time so that he could inflict the maximum amount of damage

## Instruct

possible. With amazing strength and skill, he captured **three hundred foxes** and placed them **in pairs**, tying **a torch between their two tails** (v. 4). After lighting **the torches**, he let the one-hundred-fifty **pair of foxes** run through the **wheat** fields and **burn up** all the **grain** (v. 5). Dismayed and distraught, **the Philistines** wondered **who** had **done this** and eventually concluded that Samson had sought revenge for his wife being **given** to his best man (v. 6). Both the Philistines and Samson then enter a vicious cycle of revenge. First, the Philistines enact vengeance, or what they consider justice, upon the father and his daughter by **burning** them because their actions precipitated Samson burning their crops. Second, Samson continued to seek **revenge** upon the Philistines for their brutality against his wife and father-in-law (v. 7). With an ominous declaration, Samson asserts that he **will** not **cease** until he has **taken revenge upon them** for their actions. Indeed, with his anger burning against them, he **attacked them** with a **great slaughter** and then retreated to a hiding place **in the cleft of a rock** for safety—knowing the Philistines would once again retaliate (v. 8).



## In Reference



*The meaning of the phrase he **attacked them hip to thigh** is highly uncertain. Some translations see it as an idiom which describes the intensity of the slaughter:*

## In Reference—continued



*“with great fury” (NLT), “viciously” (NIV), and “ruthlessly” (NASB). Most others translate it literally as **hip and thigh**, but it seems to have the idiomatic meaning that Samson completely or thoroughly defeated the Philistines. Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth, New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999), p. 442.*

Why is revenge cyclical? How can we break the cycle of seeking and enacting revenge?

Question  
# 2

If we allow it by maintaining an unforgiving attitude, revenge will become a never-ending cycle that can affect every area of our lives. If we are honest with ourselves, we all have probably lost sleep over someone who has offended us, wronged us, or with whom we’ve had an argument. We’ve probably laid in bed seething with anger, hoping we could do or say something to get even with that person. Not only is the loss of sleep bad for our physical health, but so is the added stress and anger which can cause a multitude of health-related problems. In addition, revenge can affect our social life because we constantly try to avoid someone, causing us at the very least not to enjoy social functions or to skip them entirely; therefore, we miss meetings and furthering other friendships because that person is also there. It can also affect us mentally by distracting our thoughts and consuming our time. Last Thanksgiving, I flew into Nashville to spend the holiday weekend with my family in the Great Smoky Mountains. While driving from Nashville to Knoxville on Interstate 40, traffic that Wednesday was bumper to bumper with the holiday rush. As we got closer to Knoxville,

## Instruct

we noticed a pick-up truck speeding, passing on the shoulder, carelessly switching lanes, and weaving all over the freeway. In the front seat, sat a man and a woman with two children in the backseat of the extended cab. As the pickup drew closer, we could see that the man and woman



were arguing vociferously; instead of looking at the road, the man was peering at the woman and animated in his express by waving his arms and bouncing up and down violently in his seat. Rather than paying

attention to the traffic and driving reasonably, the man was consumed with the argument—completely distracted. Not only were his actions endangering himself, but they also endangered the children and innocent motorists near him. Revenge affects us much the same way because we become so focused on getting even that we become distracted in every area of our lives—whether work, church, or other relationships.

What effects does harboring a spirit of revenge have upon our lives?

Question  
# 3

## Judges 15:9-13

### ***THE DESIRE TO RETALIATE :***

The desire for retaliation continues to spread and involve other people

as they became embroiled in an ever-growing dispute. Seeking to enact revenge upon Samson, **the Philistines** set up a military camp **in Judah** to find him when he fled after committing the **great slaughter** against them (v. 9). Therefore, they sent ambassadors to ask **why they had come against** them militarily (v. 10). **The Philistines** reveal that they had **come to arrest Samson** to enact retribution upon him for **what he had done**. Now, Judah was caught in the middle, but instead of aiding their fellow countryman they joined forces with the Philistines. They sent **three thousand men** to the place where Samson was hiding **in the cleft of the rock** so that they could **arrest him** and **deliver him to the Philistines** (vv. 11-12). After finding him, they sarcastically ask what he has done to anger the Philistines as if he wanted them to rule over and oppress them because of his actions. Yet, Samson sounds very worldly in his response—I **have done to them what they did to me**; in our language today,



he basically said, "They started it!" Surprisingly, Samson agrees to go with them as long as they won't kill him themselves—to which they consent, so they tied him with **two new ropes** which they hoped would be strong enough to contain him and delivered him to the Philistines (v. 13).

Most of our society today operates by Samson's logic in this text; people simply return the favor by responding in like manner to how people have previously acted toward them. In fact, many people have distorted the so-called "Golden Rule" that Jesus gives in His Sermon on the Mount: "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for

this is the Law and the Prophets” ([Matt 7:12](#)). People typically distort Jesus’ teaching by regarding it as “doing unto others as they have done unto you”—in other words, they seek to get even. This is Samson’s secular philosophy, but not Jesus’ teaching! We are not to retaliate, however, against other people for the wrongs that they have committed against us, but we are to treat them in a manner consistent with how we want to be treated ourselves. For this reason, we are to treat them with the attitude and respectfulness with which our Lord treats every one of us.

None of us wants to be treated with contempt, hatred, resentment, bitterness, or an unwillingness to be forgiven; on the other hand, we want to receive grace, mercy, patience, love, compassion, and forgiveness—and we even see Samson pleading for these very things to the Lord in [verses 18-20](#) when he asks Him for physical deliverance by giving him water to quench his thirst. Imagine, for a minute, if the Lord acted like most people, including Samson, and immediately sought revenge and retribution against those who had sinned against Him. God doesn’t take pleasure in cruelty or find satisfaction in uncontrolled outbursts of anger and revenge. Although He is just and must punish sin, He still loves us unconditionally, gives us second chances, and is willing to forgive us when we ask. He even sent His Son to die for our sake that we might have eternal life through Him—that’s how much He loves us! Even though we have rebelled against the Lord, He loved us first in an unprecedented way, so we ought to imitate that love to others in the way that we treat them—not having violent outbursts of anger

or seeking revenge, but through grace, mercy, and forgiveness that lead others to Him.

In what ways have you experienced the Lord's forgiveness in your life? How can we show that same love and forgiveness to others?

Question  
# 4

### Judges 15:14-17

#### **THE DELIVERER'S RESPONSE:**

As the men of Judah brought Samson bound in **ropes**, the **Philistines shouted** angrily, but **the Spirit of the Lord** strengthened him and **the ropes** around his **arms** and **hands broke** just as if they had been **burned** (v. 14). In his rage, Samson found a **fresh jawbone of a donkey**, which made the event even more miraculous because it would not have been as hard as older one, and used it to slaughter **a thousand men** (v. 15). Once again, Samson is quite unaware of the Lord's presence in his life and how He had strengthened him supernaturally because his mind was clouded by rage and revenge. We know that Samson is unaware of the Lord's presence because the victory song he composes celebrates his exploits alone—giving no credit and making no mention of the Lord at all (v. 16). His song mentions the weapon (a **jawbone of a donkey**), the result (**heaps** of casualties / bodies), and the victor (**I have slain**). Samson could have easily acknowledged the presence of the Lord by saying: He has delivered me or He has given me the strength to be victorious. Instead, he emphasizes how *he* (first person



I) has **slain a thousand** Philistines, omitting any reference to the Lord. Anger and revenge often blind us to the work of the Lord in our lives because we are consumed with getting even rather than offering grace and forgiveness. However, we should not confuse justice and discipline for sinful actions with revenge and indignation. Because God acts justly and hates sin, He will discipline sinners and judge the unrepentant according to their works; at the same time, however, God still extends grace and mercy by offering forgiveness to those who turn from their wicked ways and surrender to Him. Revenge, on the other hand, seeks to repay someone with evil without giving them a chance to repent or even perhaps despite their sincere repentance. Instead of imitating Samson, we ought to imitate Christ who lovingly forgave those who mocked Him while He hung on the cross; He declared, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" ([Luke 23:34](#)). Although many will reject a relationship with Christ and will face judgment because of their own choice, Christ still died for them. Jesus' overarching goal, therefore, is not to condemn the world, but to save it from its own wickedness ([John 3:17](#)). Obviously, we can't save the world as Jesus did through His sacrifice, but we can imitate our Savior to the world.

Every one of us will make many mistakes during our lifetimes and every one of us needs grace and forgiveness from the ones whom we have wronged. The Bible has a clear prescription which we can follow in order to engage in compassion and forgiveness rather than vengeance and violence. First, Scripture provides us with a concrete example of forgiveness: Christ. Twice Scripture instructs us to pattern our

forgiveness after Him ([Eph 4:32](#); [Col 3:13](#)). Christ offers His forgiveness to everyone—even if they choose not to accept it; through this extension of forgiveness, He demonstrates extraordinary love, grace, and mercy. [Daniel 9:9](#) captures this well: “To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him.” Just as we don’t deserve the forgiveness that God has offered us, many times people don’t deserve the forgiveness we should extend to them, but nonetheless we are called by His example to be compassionate in all circumstances—forgiving others just as He has forgiven us ([Matt 6:14-15](#); [Micah 7:18-19](#)). Forgiving others and being forgiven, in human terms, helps us to focus on Christ and overcome bitterness and resentment, freeing us from both grudges and guilt in our relationships.

Why should we forgive others even if they never apologize or even if they don't feel that they have wronged us?

Question  
# 5

Second, Scripture prescribes the means for forgiveness: prayer. We are to ask God for forgiveness for our own sins and transgressions to be in right standing with Him ([1 John 1:9](#); [Matt 6:12](#)). When we are in right standing with Him, we can both forgive others and seek forgiveness from them. Through prayer, the Holy Spirit will guide us to make peace with others and extend forgiveness: “And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone,



## Instruct

forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses” ([Mark 11:25](#)). Prayer, therefore, gives us the proper perspective and allows the Lord to transform our lives into one characterized by compassion and forgiveness. For this reason, prayer serves as a model in how we ought to communicate both our offering of forgiveness to others and our acceptance of their forgiveness extended to us. Prayer teaches us how to ask forgiveness from the Lord which we can use as a model to offer forgiveness to others and it also demonstrates the Lord’s acceptance of our admission of guilt and His forgiveness of us.

How does following Jesus’ example help us to offer forgiveness to others?

Question  
# 6

Third, the Bible prescribes the manner in which we should forgive: infinitely. When teaching Peter, Jesus tells him that he should not forgive just seven times, but seventy times seven ([Matt 18:21-22](#)). Jesus is not saying that we should be legalistic and forgive someone 490 times, but rather that we should forgive continuously and infinitely. We should be ready and willing to forgive when people seek true forgiveness through repentance just like our Lord and Savior does with us; even when others don’t seek forgiveness, we should readily point them to a relationship with Christ by extending a compassionate hand of forgiveness and loving them unconditionally. Although with the Lord, we shouldn’t continually and intentionally sin thinking that His grace will abound and overcome our shortcomings—that cheapens God’s grace ([Rom 6:1-2](#)). Similarly, empower others to make we shouldn’t continue to wrong people or intentionally make mistakes,

thinking they will automatically forgive us nor should we do things to the same mistakes continually by overlooking their errors—this is both irresponsible and unloving. For example, we shouldn't continue to loan money to a gambler to feed his habit, but we should be willing to forgive him, pray for him, and counsel him to seek help in the Lord to overcome his addiction. Although sin does have consequences, forgiveness has no limits even though some consequences of sin may remain after forgiveness is initiated.

Why should we not enable people to continue making mistakes even though we are willing to forgive them?

Question  
# 7

### Judges 15:18-20

#### **THE CRY FOR RESCUE:**

Whereas neither Samson, the men of Judah, or the Philistines acted compassionately or graciously, Samson still requests the Lord to show great compassion to him when he became thirsty (v. 18). Having never

acknowledged the Lord to this point in his life, Samson suddenly **cried out** to Him when he **became very thirsty**.

Although he attributes **this great deliverance** to the Lord, Samson complains that He has delivered him just to **die of**

**thirst at the hand of the Philistines**. Once again, God rescued Samson and **split the rock** so that **water** flowed forth and revived him and



## Instruct

restored his strength unto him after he drank (v. 19). The chapter ends with an announcement that Samson **judged Israel twenty years**, setting the stage for his downfall with Delilah and the last act in which the Lord works through this deliverer to begin to defeat the Philistines (v. 20).

Unfortunately, many people treat the Lord like Samson; they only acknowledge and cry out to Him when they need something. When things in their lives are going well, they take all the glory and credit, but the moment they face an obstacle they run to the Lord. God desires a consistent, daily relationship with us—not one in which we come to Him only when we are in trouble. Like a good Father, He does want us to come to Him when we are in trouble or face obstacles, but He also wants us to surrender to Him in our daily lives. He wants to be able to work through us in such a way that He is glorified and other people can be drawn into a relationship with Him. When we allow the Lord to work through us, He will transform us from a vengeful person seeking to get even to one who is ready to forgive—when He does, He will be glorified and it will point others into a relationship with Him because this attitude will contrast starkly with the world’s obsession with revenge.

Although we can turn to the Lord in times of need and trouble, what type of relationship does He desire with us?

Question  
# 8

Thankfully, we serve a God who willingly offers us forgiveness even though we live in a world that harbors bitterness and seeks revenge. Both Samson and Lincoln's client were bent on revenge as we learned in the lesson and introduction; yet, both of these men would probably prefer compassion and grace if their roles were reversed with the ones upon whom they sought revenge. In fact, anyone who has ever made a mistake would request a second chance rather than receiving unloving retribution and no chance of reconciliation through forgiveness.

Unfortunately, some human relationships cannot be restored because of the sinful perspective of one or the other individuals involved—whether one fails to offer forgiveness or the other refuses to accept forgiveness. Despite these dysfunctional relationships, we still need to be willing to forgive the other person in Christ and continue our journey in faith to become more like Him every day. We shouldn't allow these type of relationships to distract from our relationship with the Lord by allowing ourselves to be consumed with rage and bitterness; we can't allow resentment and revenge to become our focus. Instead, we ought to live as Christ did and forgive those who mock us, persecute us, and do evil against us—even when they never come to seek forgiveness for their actions. When we forgive them in Christ, we will have a much more joyous life in which we find our satisfaction in the Lord—not in seeking revenge against people who have wronged us.

## ***Incorporate***

What times in your life have you been unwilling to forgive others? What times have you been unwilling to ask for forgiveness from others?

In what ways has God helped you to restore strained relationships in your life? How did the Lord help you to restore those relationships? What advice would you give others going through the same experience?

# ***Journal: Document God's Work***

May 2018

Written and Published by  
First Baptist Church of Fort Worth

For more information  
or for questions  
please contact  
[mikeneal@fbcfw.org](mailto:mikeneal@fbcfw.org)

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(817) 485-7711 • [info@fbcfw.org](mailto:info@fbcfw.org)