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[video- Interview- actor who played Samson from TV series, "The Bible"]

"Samson- How to Recover After a Fall"

Judges 16:28- "Samson called to the Lord and said, 'O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me just this time...'"

One of my favorite passages from Proverbs (and, a favorite among many of my friends from the Mission, as well as many of you) is **Proverbs- 24:16-** For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again; but the wicked stumble in time of calamity. As I have said many times before, it is not about how you fell, or how many times you fell, but that you get up again one more time than you fell. A righteous man falls many times...but gets up again; but it is the wicked who stumble in times of calamity.

The story of Samson (**Judges 13-16**) is such a story- of one who was given great strength, great opportunities, and squandered them all, and experienced a great downfall. But, he did get up again- and that is what we will focus on today- How do you recover after a fall?

(review story)

Samson's blessings and opportunities

Judges 13:3 & 5- Godly parents (Samson was raised in a godly home)

-a wanted child (he was recognized as a "gift from God"- taught from a young child about God, Israel, His work and His ways)

- a promised child (the angel announced that she would have a very special child)

Vs. 5- dedicated to God from birth (a "Nazarite"- he took a special vow of separation for the Lord to do a special work- no strong drink, don't touch anything unclean, don't cut his hair- outward symbols of his vow)

Vs. 24- a fantastic, "bright" personality- his name, "Samson" meant, "Sunny" (he had a sparkle in his eyes, was the life of the party, had a great sense of humor, a joy to be around)

Vs. 25- The Spirit of the Lord stirred within him (Spirit-filled, Spirit possessed)

BUT, vs. 5 says, "...he shall **begin** to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines." Every other judge- "He/she will deliver..."; of Samson- "he shall **begin** to deliver..."

Where was Samson's strength? In his hair? No- not in his Nazirite vow, either; his strength was **in his God!** Tragically, that was something Samson forgot! He did not love the Lord his God with **ALL** his heart...became self- confident and proud (I have seen it happen so often- many cannot pass the ultimate test... the test of **success.**)

Samson's Downfall

Judges 16 - Samson liked to play; he liked to party- with whom? The enemy! And, while he was there, he chose a dangerous playmate- **he met a woman named Delilah**

Steps to his downfall-

Judges 16:1- saw a prostitute

Vs. 1- slept with her

Vs. 4- fell in love with her (nowhere does it say, "She loved Samson") What a tragedy- when one exchanges their love for God, a vow before God, for temporary pleasure, in the company of one who *not only* does not love you, but doesn't know *HOW* to love anyone- one who sells out to the highest bidder.

Remember quote by Ravi Zacharias- "Sin takes you farther than you want to go, keeps you longer than you want to stay, and costs you more than you want to pay."

Judges 16- Delilah sold out on Samson for a price- 3 times, she asked him- "What is the secret of your strength?" "...I will become WEAK AND LIKE ANY OTHER MAN" (threw off his oppressors 3 times). Finally, after the 4th time, he relented, and **Vs. 17-18 (NASB)-** he told her **ALL THAT WAS IN HIS HEART-** "CUT MY HAIR, and I will become **weak and like any other man**. God did not call him to be like any other man. He had a special calling on his life, a special purpose. Satan's goal- not to make us **less** than any other man; his purpose is to make us **just like him**. So, Samson said, (**Vs. 19-20**)- "I will go out as before and shake myself free.' But, **he did not know that the Lord had left him.**" tragic

Vs. 21- The Philistines came upon him suddenly, bound him, gouged out his eyes, and put him to work at a grinding wheel. **Samson was SHAMED, ALONE, WEAK, BLIND, BOUND AND GOING AROUND IN CIRCLES.**

Samson's recovery

Judges 16:21-31- "Then the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes; and they brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze chains, and he was a grinder in the prison. However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it was shaved off.

Now the lords of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice, for they said, "Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hands." When the people saw him, they praised their god, for they said, "Our god has given our enemy into our hands, even the destroyer of our country, who has slain many of us."

It so happened when they were in high spirits, that they said, "Call for Samson, that he may amuse us." So they called for Samson from the prison, and he entertained them. And they made him stand between the pillars. Then Samson said to the boy who was holding his hand, "Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them." Now the house was full of men and women, and all the lords of the Philistines were there. And about 3,000 men and women were on the roof looking on while Samson was amusing them.

Then Samson called to the Lord and said, "O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me just this time, O God, that I may at once be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes." Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and braced himself against them, the one with his right hand and the other with his left. And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" And he bent with all his might so that the house fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he killed in his life. Then his brothers and all his father's household came down, took him, brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. Thus he had judged Israel twenty years."

Four Steps to Samson's (and our) recovery when we stumble and fall

Steps to recovery (from book by Bishop Donald Hilliard- "After the Fall- resurrecting your life from shame, disgrace and guilt")

Step 1- Acknowledge your true condition (vs. 21)

The first step toward recovery after your fall is to recognize where you are. (ex.- Parable of the Prodigal Son- "He came to **himself**..." He saw himself as he really was- thinking he was free, he became so enslaved, so poor that he envied pigs, and longed to eat what they ate).

Samson's spiritual condition had deteriorated one step at a time. (We grow in spiritual life in steps; we also degenerate in steps). His descent into sin and bondage came gradually; but, the consequences came quickly. Suddenly, the Philistines came upon Samson, bound him, gouged out his eyes, and put him to work at a grinding wheel. **Samson was SHAMED, ALONE, WEAK, BLIND, BOUND AND GOING AROUND IN CIRCLES.**

But, it was there that he had time to do nothing but reflect on his life, to recognize his true condition, and there, he "came to himself". He saw himself as he really was- far beneath his calling, his gifting, his potential.

How about you? In those quiet moments, when you are truly taken aside, where you begin to listen to that "still small voice" within- have you recognized your true spiritual condition? Samson had long since abandoned his relationship with the Lord, and the Lord held on to him as long as he could; but finally, the Lord's judgment upon Samson was to let him go- to let him absorb and realize the natural consequences of his rebellious spirit. Have you truly recognized that? Have you consistently resisted the Holy Spirit's "still small voice" that God's only recourse left is to "give you over to your sins"?

The first step to recovery and restoration is to recognize your true condition. Like Samuel, you have become:

- **Shamed**- Have you dealt with the shame of your sin- not your circumstances, not your resentment regarding what others have done to you, but the shame- the painful feeling you have when you recognize the consequences of your choices?

Remember what Jesus said- **John 3:19-21**- "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."

Why is it that when we have been disobedient to God and His ways, we hide what we do, what we say, who we are in the dark? Shame! Why was it that Adam and Eve covered their nakedness (covered their vulnerability) with fig leaves, and hid from the presence of the Lord? Shame! Why is it that when you have made allowances to continue in your sin, you no longer want to come to worship services, or your LIFE-group, or meet with your spiritual mentor? Shame! Shame is the punishment we continually give ourselves for the sins in our lives that we have not adequately dealt with.

- **Alone**- Samson was with hundreds, even thousands of people (with the Philistines- maybe he even heard Delilah's voice in the crowd)- yet, he was all alone. No one was there for him. No one cared for him. His desire to run with his passions, to maintain control, to play with the enemy led him to a place in which he was all alone. Here he gave

his heart to someone who not only did not love him, but did not know how to love him. She only sold out to the highest bidder. So, here he was in a situation in which he trying to control everything and everyone around him, and what was the result? He was left **alone.**" ("lonely"- a scary word)

But, another type of loneliness- **spiritual loneliness**- when we feel like, because of our sin, because of our disobedience, we don't hear from God, we don't feel His presence, we don't see answers to our prayers, we feel like God has abandoned us. (ex.- Job's suffering- not just the loss of family, possessions and health, but repeats many times his sense of "loneliness" that God doesn't answer him).

- **Weak**- Ex.- "True Strength"- able to say the weak words- "I was wrong ...I don't know the answer...I am hurting...I need help." Samson's weakness- He needed a savior! So do we!

2 pictures- **Jesus reaching into the water**; **Jesus rescuing the lamb**

- **Blind**- Remember the story of Jesus healing the blind man in **John 9**? Here was a man who was physically blind, who was healed by Jesus, who said that when the Messiah came, he wanted to see Him. **John 9:35-37**- Jesus found him, revealed himself to him, and the man believed and worshiped Him. But, the Pharisees, who had just witnessed a miracle, could not see that that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus said to them, **vs. 38-41**-**"For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind."** The Pharisees responded, "Are you saying that we are blind too?" Jesus responded to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

In other words, there are those who have eyes, but do not see; those who have ears, but do not hear. Because of your sin and shame, have you missed seeing Jesus? If you would go to Him, and ask Him to heal you of your spiritual blindness, you would see; but, if you continue to say, "we see", your sin- your spiritual blindness-remains.

- **Bound**- Not only does sin take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay, but also, **sin is "buy now-pay later!"** You always "pay" for sin on credit. You never pay for sin up front. The consequences of sin are never realized instantly, or ahead of the rebellious act. If we had to

pay for sin up front, I guarantee you, there would be no takers. "Here, take AIDS- then you can sleep around with anyone you want...Here, take an addiction, then you can enjoy this high..." No- sin is "Buy now- pay later". But I have news for you- **payday always comes!**

- **Going around in circles**- Going nowhere, serving no purpose, reaching no goal. Jesus made us for a greater purpose! **John 14:12**- "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and **greater works** than these he will do; because I go to the Father." We were made for greater things! But, when we get taken aside by sin, we find ourselves "shamed, weak, alone, blind, bound and going around in circles."

2) Recognize your true enemy

Samson's real enemy was not the Philistines, not Delilah- it was "the devil"- **1 Peter 5:8**- "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." The devil is called many things-

-**"The tempter"**- The devil cannot make you sin. But, he is a tempter. He can somehow create opportunities- like bait on a hook- to get you to sin, so he can reel you in.

-**"The deceiver"**- the devil promises everything, and delivers nothing. His primary tool is deception- to make a lie look like the truth, to make sin attractive, to lead you away from your relationship with God and with others.

-**"disguises himself as an angel of light"**- Proverbs describes sin as "looking sweet as honey" at the beginning, and ending up "bitter as wormwood".

-**"The Accuser"**- that is, Satan is that voice inside that accuses us day and night- "You're no good...you'll never succeed...you're a loser...you are beyond hope..."

We know these things- so, how does Satan get a foothold in our lives? Our problem (from Bishop Hilliard's book) is:

- ***We don't recognize that we have an enemy-*** We don't feel the power of sin until we try to wrest ourselves free from it! The first step to freedom is to recognize our true enemy- not our husband or wife, or our boss, or our government- it is the devil!
- ***We are subject to strategies and attacks that we don't discern-*** that is, we become so saturated with lies so regularly that we no longer discern good from evil (ex.- "**Hugh Heffner's** death"- front page article- Star Ledger- "What are you most proud of?" "That I changed attitudes toward sex. That nice people can live together now. That I decontaminated the notion of premarital sex. That gives me great satisfaction." Wow- what a legacy!) But, look at what has happened in the last generation- we are constantly bombarded with this same message- through very pervasive media- through television, the internet, music, movies- we are bombarded so regularly that we begin to believe that what the Bible calls perverse and immoral and evil is now good and acceptable. We have completely lost our ability to discern truth from error, right from wrong, evil from good! The Bible says, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" (**Isaiah 5:20**)
- ***We have the power and we don't realize it-*** Jesus said, "Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you." (**Luke 10:19**)
- ***When we realize we have the power, we don't use it-*** Again, the Bible says, "**Resist the devil and (what?)- he will flee from you!**" (**James 4:7**) What if you had a terminal disease, and the doctor put in your hands the vaccine that would cure it- if you die, did you die because you had this disease- or because you **didn't take the cure**? You have the power over the enemy- **use it!**

3) Confess, repent and accept God's forgiveness

Confess that it is sin! No excuses...no hiding places...no lies...no placing the blame on others. Confess your true condition- **1 John 1:8-9**- "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But, if we confess our sins, He is faithful and

righteous to **forgive** us our sins and to **cleanse** us from all unrighteousness." Did you hear that? If the Bible said, "Confess, and you will get the just punishment for your sins", I would understand why you wouldn't do it. But, here, the Bible says, "confess, and God will (what'?) **forgive and cleanse us!** And, we need both- forgiveness for our past sins, cleansing so we don't repeat them in the future!

4) Give yourselves completely to God

Vs. 28-30- One night, the Philistines threw a wild party, and Samson was to be the entertainment. As he came out, humiliated before the people- perhaps even hearing Delilah's voice in the crowd, he prayed, "Lord, please remember me, and strengthen me just one more time, that I may be avenged for my two eyes." He leaned against one of the pillars, and it moved. Then, it tumbled out of its foundation, and the entire temple collapsed, Samson was dead; but, in his death, he accomplished more of his life's purpose (to be a deliverer of his people) than he had at any other time in his life.

Samson demonstrated a very important principle of faith: when he reached the point where he was willing to give up his life- **when he was ready to give his life, that was when the Lord could really use him!** The Lord restored his strength and he delivered his people from their oppressors. Jesus said, "He who saves his life will lose it; but, he who loses his life for my sake will find it." (**Matthew 16:25**)

The principle of faith- **Samson was foreshadowing Jesus, Who gave His life for us, to deliver us from our oppressor, the devil!**

Confession and repentance is the process of death and resurrection being worked out in us- we die to sin, we rise to righteousness; we die to the old life, we rise to new life. We die to ourselves, we rise to live for God and others.

[Communion, Creed, Confession]