

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Samson's mother is given a great promise for his life. What were her expectations, and how did reality differ? Were her expectations a product of her imagination, based on the angel's words, or both?
2. Does God's favor equal a life free of adversity and failings?
3. How can mothers completely trust in a God that allows their children to suffer rejection, humiliation, and all the mistakes of youth?
4. When you consider any of the great figures of the Bible (Moses, Esther, John the Baptist, etc.), did God's intention to use them spare them from heartache or increase it?
5. Many great biblical heroes made terrible personal choices. Did this prevent God from using them to accomplish His purposes?
6. Delilah suffered many times because of her lack of understanding and knowledge. How did this set her up to betray Samson's secret?
7. Why could she not accept Samson's love, if love was all she needed?

8. The biblical account of Samson and Delilah never reveals what happened to Delilah after Samson's death. What do you think she did? We know she was a very wealthy woman after betraying Samson.

9. If God offered you a superpower, like the one He gave Samson, which one would you request, and why?

## NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

The *British Journal of Sports Medicine* conducted a study in 2009 on the “Samson effect.” The Samson effect refers to the impact of shaving prior to athletic competitions. Shaving one’s beard, in particular, is commonly believed to impair athletic performance, but the good scientists across the pond reassure us that this is indeed a myth.<sup>1</sup>

I wanted to clear that up immediately.

Myth and Samson are two words that seem to always pop up together. Because the Samson saga resembles the legend of Hercules, some scholars accuse the biblical writers of plagiarizing the Greek myth to create the Samson character. I disagree. If you read the biblical account you’ll notice that the story mentions specific towns, families, and political events. The biblical writers wrote about Samson for an audience that lived in these towns, knew these families, and had witnessed these political events. The scribe who recorded Samson’s story had no intention of creating a myth.

But he did record a legendary account, which we still repeat today. Samson’s story impacts us all, whether we worry about shaving before an athletic competition or refer to some annoying slob as a Philistine.

And yet, I must confess, Samson has always baffled me. He has a cool story, but was his a life worth celebrating? Why is he even

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<sup>1</sup> Karim Khan, “Athletes may shave without ending like Samson,” BMJ Group Blogs, December 11, 2009, <http://blogs.bmj.com/bjbm/2009/12/11/athletes-may-shave-without-ending-like-samson>.

mentioned in the Hebrews' "faith hall of fame"? Why was such a self-indulgent guy mentioned alongside the great King David and Samuel?

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

The above phrase, *weakness was turned to strength*, is my only explanation. I believe Samson was an illustration to us of what would happen if we were given a completely human savior. Samson was born to begin the deliverance of his people. He was given supernatural strength to conquer any enemy. And yet, Samson, being completely human and not God, used this strength to serve himself. Samson proves to us that we cannot save ourselves and we cannot save each other, no matter how powerful we may be in our flesh. We may have the power to conquer anything and anyone, but we cannot conquer the sin within our hearts.

Jesus Christ, however, was both completely human and completely God. He understands our weakness because He has experienced it. He has walked with bare feet over hot sands; He has suffered loneliness and betrayal and hunger and embarrassment. Jesus did what Samson

could not: Jesus conquered sin. Jesus taught us that strength is not enough. Although Jesus had access to the same supernatural strength Samson possessed, He saw that this strength is ultimately useless in this world.

Our true enemy is sin, and sin is never overcome by our own strength. Sin is overcome by grace, the grace of a Savior who gave Himself for us. Jesus' deliberate embracing of human weakness unleashed an eternal flood of grace and mercy for anyone who cries out for help.

I think Samson made it into the faith hall of fame because Samson is us, in so many ways. If we were given strength to overcome all our enemies, our lives would not look so different from Samson's. I doubt most of us would use this strength to feed the poor or rescue the homeless. We'd be amassing fortunes and buying trinkets and sleeping around. (Or at least enjoying the constant flirtations.)

Samson's supernatural strength did not lead him to a life of greatness. His supernatural strength was overcome by ordinary human sin, and Samson stumbled along in a life of profound humiliation, disappointment, and grief. I grieved for his mother, whose name is never referenced in the biblical account. She was barren, and an angel appeared to her, giving her the promise of a son and the promise that this son would begin a great work for God. How she must have dreamed of the honor and pride he would bring the family! And how she must have suffered as he made all his foolish mistakes. I can only imagine that she was forced to live a life of radical trust, trust against all odds. How lonely her journey must have been. She, too, was a foreshadowing of the Christ story. Like Mary, she suffered as she watched her son betrayed and humiliated, and she suffered the

unimaginable pain of losing her son to a brutal death. Through her story, I am reminded that God may allow adversity, and even sin, to bring about His ultimate will in my children's lives. A life of great purpose is not a life of great ease.

Which leaves me with one more major character to examine: Delilah. Often portrayed as a seductive vixen who used her feminine wiles to betray Samson, the biblical account is quite different. Delilah is not a cardboard character used as a plot device. If you read the actual account, she gets what she wants from Samson by being persistent, not seductive. The danger she posed to Samson was not that she was seductive and able to overwhelm his manly senses, but that he had given his heart over to her. He loved her. And she was not interested in his destiny, his God, or his people. She was, however, interested in the 5,500 pieces of silver the Philistine lords offered her. Considering that Judas only got thirty pieces for Jesus, you can begin to understand that Delilah became an instant billionaire by our standards. And she didn't hurt Samson. She just shared information, like WikiLeaks.

But whatever the story means to you, whether it's a tale of redemption despite personal failures, or an encouragement to trust God with your prodigal children, I hope that it has encouraged you to reread the biblical account as found in the book of Judges in the Bible. Read it, and let the Lord draw new conclusions for you.

And I'd love to hear them, anytime.

Until we meet,  
Ginger Garrett

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(I think.) My mom is a painter who creates such gorgeous work that I can only try and write as well as she paints. God even saw fit to give me a great husband and three amazing kids, all who know that “deadline” means “take-out.” My in-laws, including Priss Waldie, Elaine Arias, Andi Arias, and Meghan Arias: I love you. Sorry you are stuck with me.

But lastly, I want to acknowledge you, my readers. I am so honored and humbled when I hear your stories. May every one of you find your own happy ending.