



## LOOKING FOR LOVE IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES

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A few years ago, we spent our family summer vacation in Lake Tahoe. One evening, following a relaxed day at the beach, my seven-year-old son and I were sitting at dinner. Everyone else had finished and left the table. He began to say something to me, but he was having difficulty expressing himself. With his head bowed, he was nervously playing with his food. "Oh good," I thought to myself. "He is going to ask me something with spiritual implications." At last he gathered himself and said, "Dad, when we were down at the beach today, why were you looking at that woman so much?" I almost gagged on the hot dog I was eating. "Oh," I said, in full retreat, "I just like to watch people to see if I can figure them out." I think he was young enough to "buy" what I said. So much for that "teachable moment." It was intended, not for my son, but for me. That which is obvious to a child certainly cannot be hidden from a God who watches over our path and knows all the vain imaginings of our hearts.

Lust and sexual fantasy are extremely powerful forces. If you do not have problems with sexual sin, then this message is not for you. If you say you do not have struggles in this regard, however, then I would say you are lying to yourself.

We live in a sex-saturated society. Sex is openly discussed in the office, in the home, on television, and in every newspaper and magazine we read.

Ever since the fall of man, our world has been looking for love in all the wrong places. Samson, whose life and exploits we have been studying in this series of messages from the book of Judges, is a good case in point. In Judges 16, we come now to what is perhaps the best known episode in his life, his affair with Delilah.

### I. Samson's Wandering Eye (16:1-3)

**Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her. When it was told to the Gazites, saying, "Samson has come here," they surrounded the place and lay in wait for him all night at the gate of the city. And they kept silent all night, saying, "Let us wait until the morning light, then we will kill him." Now Samson lay until midnight, and at midnight he arose and took hold of the doors of the city gate and the two posts and pulled them up along with the bars; then he put them on his shoulders and carried them up to the top of the mountain which is opposite Hebron. (16:1-3, NASB)**

In chapter 15 we saw that Samson had a great victory over the Philistines. He had learned important lessons about God and about his own desires, so much so that he became a judge in Israel for 20 years. But here, once again, he began to look for love in all the wrong places. He journeyed to Gaza, one the Philistine capitals, "and saw a harlot there, and went in to her." He should not have gone to Gaza in the first place. Foolishly, with a self-confidence

bordering on carelessness, in the spiritual as well as the physical realm, he opened himself up to his old enemy: he "saw a harlot." Lust of the eyes was to become his downfall again, just like the time when he saw the woman of Timnah who "looked good" to him (14:3).

The Philistines set a trap for Samson, but he arose at midnight and ripped the city gates from their foundations, carrying them with their posts to the mountain opposite Hebron, an uphill journey of 38 miles. Perhaps he was letting the Philistines know that he still had his "stuff." Perhaps he was angry with himself for falling into temptation and sin. Though he had sinned, he still retained his strength, however. On this occasion, in his mercy, God withheld judgment.

This episode in Samson's life highlights the sobering truth that if we do not deal with areas of sin in our lives — especially lust — sooner or later they will surface again. Even though Samson had judged Israel for 20 years, without a hint of sexual failure, he had not really dealt with the sins of lust and adultery. His weakness had plowed a furrow in his flesh. The power of the flesh, he learned to his cost, could surface at any time.

We must never let down our guard. Satan is always ready to pounce upon us and devour us. What a frightening proposition! We may have been walking with the Lord for years, but in an instant, in an unguarded moment, we can fall into sexual immorality. Men, especially, can be overpowered in this regard. We can never say that we are free from temptation, that we are safe. No one is immune. How many times have we have seen godly men and women whom God has used greatly, fall into temptation and adultery, just like Samson? If we have a weakness in this area, it doesn't take much pressure to make us succumb.

Unfortunately for Samson, his sin did not end in Gaza. How true are these words that someone has written of him, "Samson had power without purity, strength without self-control, and because he did not know holiness, he would know a crushing defeat." What he had sown in Gaza, he would reap in Sorek.

### II. Samson's Fatal Attraction (16:4-5)

**After this it came about that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. And the lords of the Philistines came up to her, and said to her, "Entice him, and see where his great strength lies and how we may overpower him that we may bind him to afflict him. Then we will each give you eleven hundred pieces of silver." (16:4-5)**

The name Delilah means "the weak one." How ironic! Delilah, the weak one, would make the strong one weak. She became Samson's fatal attraction. This time our hero went even further. According to the text, he "loved" Delilah. He gave his heart to her.

Samson made the mistake of not separating himself

from the Philistines. When we choose the wrong company, temptation is always close at hand. Paul put it this way, "Do not be deceived: bad company corrupts good morals" (1 Cor. 15:33). Samson thought he was safe from harm, and that the consequences of his sin would not overtake him. "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling," says the proverb (Prov 16:18). "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor 10:12).

The Philistines were catching on to Samson's weakness. So the lords of the Philistines, of which there were five, one for each of the major cities, made an offer that Delilah couldn't refuse. (This sounds like a replay of the situation between Samson and the woman of Timnah, when her family pressured her 20 years earlier.) Delilah stood to make 5,500 pieces of silver, about \$5,000 — a lot of money in those days. She agreed to the deception, and so began her game.

**So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me where your great strength is and how you may be bound to afflict you." And Samson said to her, "If they bind me with seven fresh cords that have not been dried, then I shall become weak and be like any other man." Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh cords that had not been dried, and she bound him with them. Now she had men lying in wait in an inner room. And she said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he snapped the cords as a string of tow snaps when it touches fire. So his strength was not discovered.**

**Then Delilah said to Samson, "Behold, you have deceived me and told me lies; now please tell me, how you may be bound." And he said to her, "If they bind me tightly with new ropes which have not been used, then I shall become weak and be like any other man." So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" For the men were lying in wait in the inner room. But he snapped the ropes from his arms like a thread.**

**Then Delilah said to Samson, "Up to now you have deceived me and told me lies; tell me how you may be bound." And he said to her, "If you weave the seven locks of my hair with the web and fasten it with a pin, then I shall become weak and be like any other man." So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his hair and wove them into the web. And she fastened it with the pin, and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he awoke from his sleep and pulled the pin of the loom and the web. (16:6-14)**

Here, Delilah's scheme of enticement and deceit is revealed. How well she fits the description of the adulterous woman in Proverbs: "With her many persuasions she entices him; with her flattering lips she seduces him" (Prov 7:21). Three different times Delilah begged and enticed, but Samson did not reveal the source of his great strength. Neither fresh cords nor new ropes succeeded in binding him. Weaving the locks of his hair and fastening them with a pin did nothing to sap his strength. Notice, however, that he was coming closer and closer to revealing his secret. We don't often fall into obvious deception. Slowly, our will wears down until at last we tumble headlong over the precipice. We want to see how close we can come to sin and still remain in control, but suddenly, things begin to move so fast we cannot stop ourselves. The first steps

are determinative. This was what happened to Samson.

**Then she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart is not with me? You have deceived me these three times and have not told me where your great strength is." And it came about when she pressed him daily with her words and urged him, that his soul was annoyed to death. So he told her all that was in his heart and said to her, "A razor has never come on my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I am shaved, then my strength will leave me and I shall become weak and be like any other man." (16:15-17)**

Delilah had a novel approach: she accused Samson of deception. But she herself, of course, was the deceiver. Even worse, she "pressed him daily...his soul was annoyed to death." His patience wore thin. The woman of Timnah also pressed him hard until she finally extracted from him the solution to the riddle. It is apparent that Samson had not learned his lesson.

Delilah won, of course. Sadly, the text reveals, Samson "told her all that was in his heart." What fools sin makes of us! We may toy with temptation for a while, but if we dare to do so, in the end we will succumb to its allurements. Proverbs has a word here, too:

*Suddenly he follows her,  
As an ox goes to the slaughter,  
Or as one in fetters to the discipline of a fool,  
Until an arrow pierces through his liver;  
As a bird hastens to the snare,  
So he does not know that it will cost him his life. (Pr 7:22-23)*

A prisoner of his own lust, Samson, like a helpless ox, was led to the slaughter. Delilah's nagging had brought the world's strongest man, weak and compliant, to his knees.

If sex is the only basis of a relationship, the man loses his ability to lead, to think clearly and objectively. People who rely solely on physical affection will compromise anything, even God, even a Nazirite vow, to gain love.

And now the consequences of Samson's sin.

**When Delilah saw that he had told her all that was in his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, "Come up once more, for he has told me all that is in his heart." Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her, and brought the money in their hands. And she made him sleep on her knees, and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his hair. Then she began to afflict him, and his strength left him. And she said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And he awoke from his sleep and said, "I will go out as at other times and shake myself free. But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him. 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. (16:18-21)**

Samson had already had several hair-raising escapes, but God did not bail him out this time. The fact that judgment wasn't visited upon him up to now, however, does not mean he was in the clear. He had used up all his "Get out of Jail" cards. The Lord had departed from him. Samson did not even know that his strength had left him. How sad! He expected to be able to shake himself free, as he had at other times when he had sinned, but he had lost touch

with God.

Appropriately, God's judgment fit Samson's sin: "the Philistines...gouged out his eyes." God finally dealt with the source of Samson's problem — his lustful eyes. Paul warned, "Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body" (1 Cor. 6:18). We may be thankful that God does not deal with us in the same way he dealt with Samson.

And second, Samson lost his pride: he became a "grinder in the prison." Nothing, not the lion, not the Philistines, could defeat him, but now he was a slave, laboring in Gaza, where he had visited a prostitute and ripped out the city gates, escaping without harm. He had pursued Philistine women; now the strong man was reduced to doing a woman's work for the Philistines.

*For the lips of an adulteress drip honey,  
And smoother than oil is her speech;  
But in the end she is bitter as wormwood,  
Sharp as a two-edged sword.  
Her feet go down to death,  
Her steps lay hold of Sheol.* (Prov 5:3-5)

*Can a man take fire in his bosom,  
And his clothes not be burned?  
Or can a man walk on hot coals,  
And his feet not be scorched?*

*So is the one who goes in to his neighbor's wife;  
Whoever touches her will not go unpunished.* (Prov 6:27-29)

An illicit affair, which seemed so sweet at the beginning, ended in disaster for this Nazirite of God.

The lesson we learn from this sorry episode in Samson's life is this: What appears to be life-giving can, in fact, be death-producing.

There are consequences to sin. Although we may evade them for a while, we cannot escape forever. "The wages of sin," says Paul, "is death" (Rom 6:23). If we will not listen when God whispers in love, he will force us to listen when he shouts in discipline. Ambrose, an early Church Father, wrote, "Samson, when brave, strangled a lion; but he could not strangle his own love. He burst the fetters of his foes; but not the cords of his own lusts. He burned the crops of others, and lost the fruit of his own virtue when burning with the flame enkindled by a single woman."

Lust and sexual immorality have destroyed the strongest and most self-assured men and women. The allurements, of course, is invariably intoxicating. Even though people may have witnessed the disastrous consequences of wrongful sexual behavior, however, they are still susceptible.

With this monster on the loose, how should we live? How can we be godly men and women in the face of the ever-present enticement to sexual sin? I have three exhortations for us this morning.

First, Christians must cultivate intimacy with God. Lack of such intimacy frequently is the root of the problem of lust. According to Scripture, there is a close connection between sexuality and spirituality (1 Corinthians 6; Song of Solomon). We desire intimacy and oneness, to possess and to be possessed. When we are in love, we have similar emotions and feelings as we have in worship. Our sexual desires are indicators that we have a deep hunger for intimacy and worship. When we do not have intimacy with God, however, we seek to fulfill these desires in another way, and sex becomes our worship. But sex will never ful-

ly satisfy. This was Samson's problem. As long as he looked to God to quench his thirst he was all right, but when he stopped looking to God he became thirsty and succumbed to temptation.

This can become a pattern. We become addicted to sex because we thirst, and we drink to satisfy our lust. We are okay for a while, but then we become thirsty again and we end up looking for love in all the wrong places. So we must begin with God. We must seek to have our thirst quenched at a deeper level, by Christ, by him abiding in us, and we abiding in him.

Marriage does not solve the problem of lust. We can never satisfy lust by our own resources. At its deepest level, lust is a spiritual problem for a fallen humanity. Our worship is misguided, and we need to deal with it sooner or later if we truly want what God desires for our lives. Even when we are married we can fall into Samson's pattern. We are not intimate with God, so we become addicted to sex. We compromise everything to achieve the love and affection we so desperately want. We may not have an affair, but we strive to satisfy our lust with our spouse. This is selfish love.

If we want to experience a godly rather than a lustful love, then, we need to cultivate intimacy with our Lord. If he fills us, if our thirst is quenched in him, our need for intimacy will be satisfied at the deepest level and we will be less likely to look for love in the wrong places and the wrong ways. We will be much more likely to love our spouse with an attitude of giving rather than taking.

Secondly, we must cultivate a ruthless attitude toward lust and sexual fantasy. If we do not judge ourselves and take a drastic stand against sexual misconduct, sexual fantasy and lustful thinking, the text says that God will do this for us. Jesus had a word for this: "If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell" (Matt 5:29).

There are several things that can help us in this regard. First, we should deal ruthlessly with our thought life. Listen to this proverb,

*Do not desire her beauty in your heart,  
Nor let her catch you with her eyelids.* (Prov 6:25)

Lust begins with the thought life, in the mind. Samson's life demonstrates that the first steps are determinative. We cannot toy with temptation. If we do, we will get burned. The way to fight lustful thoughts is to nip them in the bud.

My son used to have scary dreams when he was little boy. One day he told me that he had developed a plan to deal with things that frightened him. Whenever he had a scary thought, he told me, he "changed the channel." If you don't get in the habit of "changing the channel," then sooner or later you will act on your musings. Even if you don't act on them, the intimacy you enjoy with your spouse is proportional to the purity of your mind. If you fantasize all day, then you will try to satisfy your selfish lust with your spouse.

Second, think critically and objectively about what you see and hear. If you think about it, fantasies are really stupid and illogical, aren't they? When those alluring commercials are shown on television, ask yourself, "Is this really portraying life? Would my life really be like this, an endless beach party in the company of gorgeous looking people, if I drank their beer?" How many of us are likely

to have an affair with Christie Brinkley or Tom Selleck? Think critically and objectively about what you see and hear.

Romans says we must “renew our minds.” We cannot satisfy our own lusts. We have neither the authority nor the power to give pleasure to ourselves. This is what Paul says in 1 Cor 7:4: “the wife does not have authority over her own body but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.” Rather than having a selfish attitude toward sex, we are to develop a giving attitude, an unselfish love with our spouse. A paradox in life is that when we seek our life we lose it. When we lose our life, on the other hand, we gain it. Sex is a gift, and husbands and wives should offer themselves as a gift to one another in marriage.

Third, be accountable to your brothers and sisters in Christ. James says we are to confess our sins to one another and pray for one another “so that you may be healed” (5:16). This is how to stay out of the emotional emergency room. We need Christian friends to share with and pray with. If we go on a business trip, we need friends who will call us or whom we can call — even in the middle of the night. When we return home, we need people who will ask us how we fared. We need to remember that others struggle with the same things. Last week, I was with a group of young men whom I meet with regularly and we were talking about this very thing. One of the men remarked how helpful it was for him to be able to discuss these matters with other men and share his struggles in this area.

Fourth, we need to be wise in where we go, what we see, and what we hear. The proverb says,

*Keep your way far from her,*

*And do not go near the door of her house. (Prov 5:8)*

*“Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways,*

*Do not stray into her paths. (Prov 7:25)*

Recognize what gets you in trouble and where you get in trouble, and then avoid these things and these places. The answer is, do not enter the door, because once you do, you are finished. If this means you can't watch certain movies, then don't watch them. If it means you can't listen to certain music, then don't listen. If it means you can't hang out at certain places, then don't visit those places. If you are tempted by pornography, don't drive down the street where the bookstore or the video store is located; find another way home. If a television commercial sends you into cardiac arrest, turn the channel before your heart gives out.

Flee these things. This is the word that Paul uses: “flee [sexual] immorality” (1 Cor 6:18); “flee from idolatry” (1 Cor 10:14); “flee from these things, you man of God” (1 Tim 6:11); “flee from youthful lusts” (2 Tim 2:22). What a contrast Joseph was to Samson! Samson hung around when he was faced with temptation, leaving himself open to further temptation, but when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph, he fled so quickly he left his coat behind him.

Commit yourself to dealing drastically with this beast called lust. This takes work. We must be on our guard at all times. I don't say these things in a legalistic sense. It is

wise to live this way. Our goal should be to know how to possess our own vessel in sanctity and honor; that Christ, not we ourselves, controls our bodies; that we rule over lust rather than lust ruling over us. Then we can enjoy intimacy with God and with our spouse as God intended.

Finally, we should cultivate romance with our spouses. I despise what the world has done to this wonderful expression of our humanity. Sin has perverted the love that was created and designed by God to be shared in marriage. Pornography, rape, abuse, movies, etc., cause us to have either a negative or a carnal view of sex. God intended neither.

Sex is a gift of God, given to married couples for their enjoyment. Let us have a healthy attitude toward sex, and elevate our view of this part of creation. In marriage we are free to enjoy, not worship, but to enjoy this gift as God designed. This is what the proverb says,

*Rejoice in the wife of your youth.*

*As a loving hind and a graceful doe,*

*Let her breasts satisfy you at all times;*

*Be exhilarated always with her love.*

*For why should you, my son, be exhilarated with an adulteress,*

*And embrace the bosom of a foreigner? (Prov 5:18-20)*

Be exhilarated, be intoxicated with your spouse. Stolen water may seem sweet, but if you drink it, as Samson learned, the consequences will be disastrous. Why become exhilarated with someone you don't know, someone with whom you have no shared history? Why fantasize when you have someone to cultivate love with for a lifetime?

Last weekend, my children were looking through a couple of boxes in our bedroom and they discovered some old letters and love poems I had written to my wife years ago. I was a little embarrassed, but my wife pointed out that it was good for our children to see that we had romance in our relationship. She was right. Often, what our children see portrayed as romance is actually sexual impurity. They need to see real romance modeled, to see that we write love letters to our spouses, to see husbands and wives with their arms around each other.

No foreigner could plumb the depth of intimacy and the history I share with my wife. There is so much more involved in marriage than that which is merely physical. Cultivate romance with your spouse, therefore. Go out on dates together. Go away together for a weekend. Buy her flowers. Write poems to her. Make a loving fool of yourself! Be exhilarated with her love. You invest a lot of time and money on things that are not nearly as valuable. We must spend time with God to develop intimacy with him, and so it follows that we must spend time to develop intimacy with our spouse as well.

The life of Samson teaches some sobering things — principles that he had to learn the hard way. Fortunately, his story does not end there, as we will see next week in our final study in Judges.

We need to take these issues to heart. May we be godly men and women who seek to cultivate intimacy with our God, purity in our minds, and faithfulness and romance in our marriages. Amen.

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