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CEDARCREEKCHURCH

Looking Ahead - 06.30.2024 - Bad Boys of the Bible

June 30, 2024

Have you ever felt like you lost sight of your purpose? How did that impact the choices you made?

As we conclude our Bad Boys of the Bible series this week, we step into the story of Samson (Judges 13) and see how losing sight of his purpose led to a series of missteps.

We too can easily wander off the path of our purpose causing us to miss the potential God has for us. But no matter how far off course we get, God can redeem the situation and help us unlock the potential and purpose he has for our lives.

This week, invite the Lord to open your eyes to the purpose he has for you - a purpose that allows you to bless others and bring glory to his name.

Set aside any distractions, close your eyes, take a few slow, deep breaths, and approach the Lord with humility. Consider recording your responses in a journal, whether digital or hard copy. It's a wonderful way to be able to look back on the adventure God has you on.

Prayer:

Lord, I praise you for the purpose you've created me for. I confess that, like Samson, sometimes I veer off onto my own path, thinking only about what makes me happy, rather than honoring you. Today Lord, help me clearly see the purpose you have for me, so I may use it to bring glory to you for the benefit of others.

Series Theme Verse:

Psalm 37:3-4

³ Trust in the Lord and do good. Then you will live safely in the land and prosper. ⁴ Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart's desires.

This post was written by Kelly Pagel, the Director of the LivingItOut.

Discussion Questions:

Icebreaker: What does "living up to your potential" mean to you?

What types of things can prevent us from living up to our potential?

Read Judges 14:1-3 and 8-9. What do you observe Samson doing? Share a time you ignored wise advice.

How have you allowed your hunger for things to distract you from God's purpose in your life?

How are you encouraged when you read Hebrews 11:32-33? What do you learn about God and his grace?

Where is God inviting you to take a step in knowing your purpose, surrounding yourself with good people, or using your gift for others?

God Can Use Our Mistakes - Bad Boys of the Bible

July 1, 2024

Samson was one of the leaders God appointed to save the Israelites from other oppressing nations. The angel of the Lord appeared to Samson's parents, explaining that God had a great plan for their son, and that he must follow certain instructions from God (Judges 13). However, as Samson grew up, he disregarded the rules. Despite his parents' advice to choose a wife from their tribe and faith, Samson became infatuated with a Philistine woman - the tribe Samson was supposed to deliver the Israelites from. Ignoring his parents' advice, Samson decided to marry her.

Have there been times when you did not listen to your parents and wish you did? Samson's parents ultimately acquiesced and they headed to Timnah for the wedding. Along the way, we read about Samson's first experience of supernatural godly strength as he rips a lion apart. We read about it again after he was deceived by his bride to be and destroys 30 men to pay back the bet he lost (Judges 14:16-19).

After years of dealing with Samson's incredible feats of strength, the Philistines captured him and gouged out his eyes. In his distress, Samson prayed to God for vengeance against the Philistines. God gave Samson the strength he needed, but Samson died alongside his enemies.

Reflecting on Samson's choices raises many questions: What if Samson had listened to his parents, followed God's guidance for living, and upheld his vows? What if Samson had surrounded himself with wise friends, rather than selfish ones? His life might have unfolded differently, potentially allowing God to use his leadership abilities for a greater purpose.

The story of Samson reminds us that, regardless of our mistakes, God can still use our lives for his glory. Our experiences, good and bad, are part of a larger narrative of redemption and purpose. We may not fully see the redemption and purpose in our lifetime, however we can trust that God is using our story.

Hebrews 11:1-2, 32

¹ *Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see.* ² *Through their faith, the people in days of old earned a good reputation.*

³² *How much more do I need to say? It would take too long to recount the stories of the faith of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and all the prophets.*

Questions:

When have you ignored advice and experienced negative consequences from that action?

How has God used that mistake to help others?

Next Steps:

Samson's story is in Judges 13-16. Spend time this week reading the entire story.

In your Group or with a trusted friend, consider sharing an incident where you did not listen to advice. You may be surprised that someone else has followed the same path, and others can learn from your mistake.

Prayer:

Dear God, I have not always listened to good advice. Unfortunately, that has led to some negative consequences. When I need to make a major decision, help me to be humble and actively listen. I know that you know best. Help me trust in you and follow you all the days of my life. Amen.

Series Theme Verse:

Psalm 37:3-4

³ Trust in the Lord and do good. Then you will live safely in the land and prosper. ⁴ Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart's desires.

This post was written by Connie Disbro, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Devotional.

Squandered Strength - Bad Boys of the Bible

July 2, 2024

In Sampson, we find a man with immense potential, a divine calling, and supernatural strength. Yet, his story is marred by a series of poor decisions. He serves as a reminder of how ignoring godly advice can lead to a squandered purpose and wasted potential.

Proverbs 18:2 says, "Fools have no interest in understanding; they only want to air their own opinions." Samson often acted impulsively, driven by personal desires rather than divine direction. His infatuation with Delilah, despite clear warning signs and his parents' concerns, is a prime example.

Samson's strength was meant to liberate Israel from Philistine oppression. However, his lack of discipline and discernment diverted him from his purpose. Samson chose to indulge in fleeting pleasures and relationships that did not honor God, thereby losing sight of his calling. Proverbs 13:10 reminds us, "Pride leads to conflict; those who take advice are wise." His story might have been one of sustained triumph rather than tragic waste had he humbled himself to accept guidance.

This serves as a powerful lesson for us today. No matter how gifted or strong we may be, our potential can only be fully realized when we are obedient to God's guidance and receptive to the wisdom he places around us.

Samson's journey also highlights the dangers of pride and self-reliance. In his arrogance, he believed he could navigate life's challenges on his terms, ignoring the wisdom of those who sought to guide him. This pride led to his downfall and hindered the fulfillment of his divine mission. Proverbs 11:14

states, "Without wise leadership, a nation falls; there is safety in having many advisers." We are called to seek, value, and heed the counsel of others, especially those grounded in God's Word.

In our own lives, we must strive to be vigilant, humble, and receptive to the wisdom God provides through his Word and through the people he places in our paths. Ignoring such counsel can lead us astray, causing us to miss the fullness of our God-given potential. Let us learn from Samson's mistakes and commit to a path of humility and obedience, ensuring that our lives reflect the purpose and glory of God.

Remember, lost purpose leads to wasted potential.

Questions:

In what areas of your life have you been ignoring wise counsel or divine guidance? How can you seek and apply that wisdom moving forward?

Are there any personal desires or impulses that are diverting you from your God-given purpose? What steps can you take to realign your actions with God's will?

Next Steps:

Spend time in prayer and reflection today, asking God to reveal any areas in your life where you may be ignoring His guidance or the counsel of wise advisors. Write down any insights or areas of conviction that come to mind. Then, commit to seeking out and listening to one trusted, godly advisor this week for guidance on how to align your actions with God's will.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for the lessons from Samson's life, a stark reminder of the dangers of pride and the importance of seeking your guidance. Forgive me for the times I ignored your wisdom and followed my desires. Help me to be humble and receptive to the counsel you place in my path.

Lord, I ask you to reveal any areas where I have strayed from your purpose. Grant me the wisdom to seek and heed godly advice, and the strength to align my actions with your will. May my life reflect your glory and fulfill the purpose you have designed for me. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

Series Theme Verse:

Psalm 37:3-4

³ Trust in the Lord and do good. Then you will live safely in the land and prosper. ⁴ Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart's desires.

This post was written by Monique Myers, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Devotional.

Find Maturity in Your Mistakes - Bad Boys of the Bible

July 3, 2024

My friend Doug hosted a sleepover for six of us in May 1994. As the night began, we balled on his driveway court, played Super Nintendo, and watched *Menace II Society* (the title speaks for itself) on VHS. Next, we did what any six teenage boys (ages 13-15) would do at a sleepover — we snuck out and roamed the streets because the “Too Old for Us” movie encouraged us to be menaces to society.

We were teenagers having fun, but we chose to break the rule about not leaving Doug's yard. We weren't looking to fight, vandalize, or steal, but our group was noisy and verbally tough after midnight. Nothing good happens after midnight (something I tell my kids) unless you play board games at your CedarCreek Findlay Campus group. Our rule-breaking misstep resulted in someone calling the cops. After running, we escaped trouble by hiding in a cornfield but we didn't all get away unscathed. Some continued to break the rules. And today, as a result, they are living outside of their purpose.

The Bible is full of truths showcasing God's people breaking the rules. One of the most intriguing stories is of [Samson](#) and his remarkable strength.

Judges 14:8-9

⁸ Later, when he returned to Timnah for the wedding, he turned off the path to look at the carcass of the lion. And he found that a swarm of bees had made some honey in the carcass. ⁹ He scooped some of the honey into his hands and ate it along the way. He also gave some to his father and mother, and

they ate it. But he didn't tell them he had taken the honey from the carcass of the lion.

As a Nazarite, Samson was forbidden to touch anything dead or consume unclean food.(Numbers 6:1-21) Samson broke the rules, and the satisfaction that came with it made it easier to stray from God's plan. Although our choices may seem inconsequential during the moment, they can significantly impact the long-term trajectory of our lives.

God filled Samson with his spirit and the strength to conquer the lion. He can do that for you, but can you continue to humbly show and share God's goodness with others? Samson had the right idea, but his immaturity and execution broke God's law. God has already equipped you with spiritual gifts. Be mature about using them.

Questions:

Have you discovered your purpose? Does the cycle of past mistakes make you shy away from your purpose?

Next Steps:

Download the CedarCreek App and engage with the daily section to grow spiritually. Attend Growth Track to learn about your spiritual gifts and discover how to use them for God's glory.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, I've been humble in my approach, but I don't always follow your rules or your path. I pray for focus and mindfulness as you continue to lead me as designed. I pray for patience as I follow you because I understand my time differs from yours. Amen.

Series Theme Verse:

Psalm 37:3-4

³ Trust in the Lord and do good. Then you will live safely in the land and prosper. ⁴ Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart's desires.

This post was written by Jaron Camp, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Devotional.

Learn from your Mistakes! - Bad Boys of the Bible

July 4, 2024

If you are anything like me, your childhood and adolescence was a rather painful learning process. As we grow and mature, our parents offer sound advice and set rules in place for our own good. While I was never really a bad youngster, I still liked to challenge the validity of the rules from time to time. After all, “rules are made to be broken.”

Once, I decided to build a bike ramp in our stone driveway. Of course, this went against all sound advice and rules my parents had in place. The result? After the jump, my bike slid into the stones. I lost control and ended up in the ditch — smack dab in the middle of a large thorn bush. Ouch! Even when we are aware of the potential consequences, some of us continue to test the rules, even as adults, because we think it’s exciting.

Samson repeatedly ignored God’s instructions and arrogantly broke rules outlined in his Godly heritage. When you get away with something once, it’s easy to think there are no consequences for those actions.

Judges 16:4-5

⁴Some time later Samson fell in love with a woman named Delilah, who lived in the valley of Sorek. ⁵The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, “Entice Samson to tell you what makes him so strong and how he can be overpowered and tied up securely. Then each of us will give you 1,100 pieces of silver.”

Delilah urgently tried to entice Samson to divulge the secret of his great strength, and several times over, Samson lied to her. Each time, she pressed harder. If I was Samson, I would have become very suspicious of Delilah’s intentions. Samson finally divulged the truth about his great strength. Maybe his arrogance led him to believe nothing bad would ever happen. So that same night while he slept, she cut off his hair and turned him over to the Philistines. They gouged out his eyes and forced him to work in prison (Judges 16:21). Sampson’s missteps had finally caught up with him and initially, it looked like the Philistines had the last laugh ...

Judges 16:22

But before long, his hair began to grow back.

Join us tomorrow for the conclusion of this story...

Questions:

In what areas of your life do you find yourself bending the rules, or ignoring sound advice?

Can you relate to Samson, following one misstep with another?

Next Steps:

When faced with the temptation of rule-breaking, ask God for wisdom and strength of avoidance.

Read tomorrow's post to find out how the story ends.

Join one or more of the many groups available to have a great support team of peers to help you in times of struggle.

Prayer:

Loving Father, you always have my best interest at heart, and justly have given me rules and guidelines to help me find my way to you. Your advice is wise and sound, so help me follow your guidance. Please give me the wisdom to discern between right and wrong, the strength of character to follow the rules you have given me, and the good sense to heed the wise advice of the people you have placed in my life. Help me avoid a domino effect of missteps and keep my focus on you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Series Theme Verse:

Psalm 37:3-4

³ *Trust in the Lord and do good. Then you will live safely in the land and prosper.* ⁴ *Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart's desires.*

This post was written by Ned Miller, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Devotional.

One Decision Away - Bad Boys of the Bible

July 5, 2024

Imagine being blind and captive! Now a prisoner of the Philistines, whom you had tormented for so long, you are bound and forced to grind grain like an ox. This is Samson's situation.

My heart breaks when I consider Samson's plight, but I can relate. And, I bet those of us who have squandered the gifts God blessed us with, understand what Samson hadn't yet begun to realize in prison. (Judges 16:20).

You see, I was blessed with an intact, extended family who loved me and Jesus! Yet I chose to turn my back on all of that and wandered in the wilderness for years. My pride and selfishness caused me to think that I could tough it out on my own. Sadly, I left a wake of brokenness and neglect behind me — the wreckage of relationships I had destroyed. For a couple of years, I knew it was only a matter of time before I would have to follow God's call on my life. The Holy Spirit was working on my heart, and he drew me to him over time, just as he was drawing Samson to himself.

In Judges 16:23-27, the Philistine rulers threw a party to celebrate capturing Samson. Hoping to taunt their prisoner, they brought Samson out before all of the 3,000 guests, placing him between the pillars that held up the building.

Judges 16:28-30

²⁸ Then Samson prayed to the LORD, "Sovereign LORD, remember me again. O God, please strengthen me just one more time. With one blow let me pay back the Philistines for the loss of my two eyes." ²⁹ Then Samson put his hands on the two center pillars that held up the temple. Pushing against them with both hands, ³⁰ he prayed, "Let me die with the Philistines." And the temple crashed down on the Philistine rulers and all the people. So he killed more people when he died than he had during his entire lifetime.

Samson's life shows us that even when you think things are too far gone - God can redeem. No matter how far away from God we are, no matter how bad our life looks, we are one decision away from realizing the purpose we are given by God. All we have to do is realize that God will help us unlock the potential and the purpose in each of our lives.

Questions:

Do you think you have out-sinned God's capacity to forgive? Have you brought this sin to God in repentance?

Next Steps:

Spend some time thinking about your relationship with God. Remove whatever stands in the way of deepening your relationship with him.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for your immense capacity to forgive! I am sorry for all the times I have tried to forge ahead on my own. Give me the desire to turn from my sin and return to you with my whole heart. I want my life to bring glory to you and you alone. Help me move forward in the purpose and plan you have for me. In your beautiful name, I pray.

Series Theme Verse:**Psalm 37:3-4**

³ Trust in the Lord and do good. Then you will live safely in the land and prosper. ⁴ Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart's desires.

This post was written by Lauri White, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Devotional.

Reflections - 07.06.2024 - Bad Boys of the Bible

July 6, 2024

Over the past five weeks, we've looked at some bad boys of the Bible, allowing us to see God's heart for these men and to learn from their mistakes. Samson's story reminded us that lost purpose leads to wasted potential.

Today, take some time to review the scripture that stood out to you. You may consider reading Judges 14:8-9, Proverbs 18:2, or our series theme verse, Psalm 37:3-4. Look back on any notes you may have captured over the past few days, and jot down any actions you took this week.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for the example of men like David, Absalom, Samson, and others, whose lives weren't perfect, and yet you chose to have their stories

recorded for me to read. Help me learn from them, Father – what they did well, and where they faltered. Help me to always remember that I have a purpose when I follow and glorify you in what I say and do. Use my life to benefit others so they may come to know you. In Jesus' name, amen.

Series Theme Verse:

Psalm 37:3-4

³ Trust in the Lord and do good. Then you will live safely in the land and prosper. ⁴ Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart's desires.

This post was written by Kelly Pagel, the Director of the LivingItOut.