

MAKE

GETTING RIGHT WHAT

YOUR

SAMSON GOT WRONG

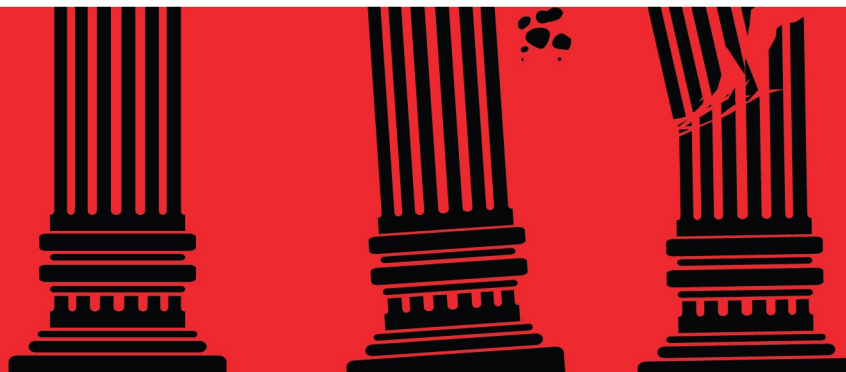
MARK

BRAD GRAY

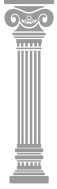


DISCUSSION GUIDE

FOR GROUP AND PERSONAL STUDY



About This Discussion Guide



First of all, I'm thrilled you've decided to spend additional time thinking through the life of Samson and wrestling with how his story can empower you to more effectively leave a positive mark on our world. It's one thing to read a book; it's another thing to marinate in the chapters and allow yourself the space to be challenged by and apply what you're learning. Our hope is this discussion guide will serve you well in this vital process.

Our team designed this discussion guide for small group study, as well as for personal use. You'll notice there are instructions and things to consider for those who are using this to lead a group study. If you're using this for personal use, you can simply disregard those comments.

We've created a number of questions for each chapter (as well as questions within questions). If you're a small group leader, please choose the questions you believe will be most helpful for your group as there are more questions there than you'll likely be able to tackle in one sitting. We do recommend that, whatever questions you choose, you discuss them in the order that they're listed, as they are in step with the chronological flow of the chapters in *Make Your Mark* (and you will see the corresponding page numbers with many of the questions).

If significant conversation ensues around a particular chapter, and you're only able to get through a couple of the questions, you may want to consider coming back to that chapter for your next gathering and continuing with the questions you weren't able to get to. There is a lot to consider in each of these chapters, and the point isn't to rush through it, but to glean and process as much as you can.

Finally, you'll notice that each chapter's discussion questions are listed on a single page, making it easier to print off individual chapters for your group or personal study.

Enjoy the deeper journey!

Brad Gray

CHAPTER 1

Under the Sea

1. What was most surprising to you in this opening chapter?
2. Think of a Bible story you once learned and took at “face value,” that you now see has lessons beyond the basic narrative (p. 3). Which story comes to mind? What are lessons you now see beyond the surface story?
3. Picture a person-on-the-street survey. The two most important aspects of life for the ancients of Samson’s time were land and family (p. 4). What do you think a typical person from the Western world today would say are the two most important aspects of his/her life? Would you give the same answers for your own life? If not, what would your answers be?
4. What did you learn from the note at the book’s end (#1 on p. 177) that may help if you or someone you know is experiencing infertility (p. 4)?
5. If you’re a Christian, would you say that you’ve made a vow of “complete dedication to God” (p. 5)? What are some of the aspects of that vow that cause you to be set apart from others—to be somehow different?
6. Consider your own life. What is the “surface story” of your life, your family, your relationships, your strengths and accomplishments? What if we were able to peer under the surface, to dive deep into what is really the story of your life; where are the deep fissures, where is the great pain, and what surprising triumphs, struggles and challenges have you faced? Most of all, in these “under the surface” realities, where have you seen God move and act and guide in life-giving ways?

[Ask participants to be careful not to compromise confidences. Encourage them to share with the group only what they could freely say if the other people involved in their story were also in the room. On a separate note, if this question feels “too deep” at this point for the group to discuss, simply pose this question for them to think through as they read the rest of the book. This question could then be asked again at the end of the study.]

7. What gets you the most excited about reading the rest of this book?

CHAPTER 2

Rushed by the Spirit

1. How has this week's study of Samson added to or altered the story as you knew it? What was your major takeaway?
2. The "Shephelah" (p. 12) was the buffer zone where the faith of the Hill Country (Israelites) met the worldliness of the Coastal Plain (Philistines). How do you live faithfully in the tension between these two worlds in the "Shephelah" of your life, and adequately function as the influencer rather than the influenced?
3. On p. 13, the author suggests Samson was reluctant to begin living into his identity and calling, resulting in the Holy Spirit acting to stir him. Have you ever struggled with reluctance or apathy in regards to your identity or calling? Where do you think your hesitation or unwillingness came from?
4. On p. 21, did you catch note #13 about retirement (p. 179)? How might this influence your retirement planning or even what you're currently doing, in order to more fully live into the plans and purposes of God?
5. As Samson is described to have done on pp. 30–31, when have you blatantly ignored the Holy Spirit's plea/nudge/inner prompting (whether out of desire, apathy or anger), and acted other than instructed? What happened next? How would listening to the Holy Spirit and appropriating His strength have preempted any confusion, pain, or harm that resulted (pp. 32–33)? What are some ways you can cultivate ears that are sensitive and receptive to the Spirit's voice?
6. Consider again the lion that appeared when Samson was on his way to marry the Philistine woman (p. 32). The lion attempted to turn him back from a wrong direction. In what situation or time has a "lion" shown up in your life to give you a chance to turn around? Maybe your "lion" was a family member, an employer, a colleague, the birth of a child, or a group like Celebrate Recovery.
7. The author contends, "As tragic as the Samson story is, it's a gift. Seeing the causes and effects of poorly made decisions from another's life helps us make changes in our own" (p. 35). What are some key lessons you've learned in your own life by viewing poor decisions made by another?

CHAPTER 3

Seventy-Seven Times

1. What are some forms of revenge that are sanctioned or commonly indulged in our society—be it sports, social media, gang or tribal culture, business practices, etc.?
2. Have you experienced the escalation of revenge in your own life? With a divorce? A former business associate? A classmate? In a friendship? Even within a local church? Describe the collateral damage to others that was an unintended consequence of that revenge escalation (p. 43). What might potentially have happened if that matter was instead given over to God?

[Remember not to name names or otherwise speak in a way that you could not do with the other parties present.]

3. If revenge isn't inherently wrong and God is profoundly aware of evil done against us (p. 49), what are you possibly saying about God when you take matters into your own hands instead? As an example, do you *really* believe that there are things that *only God* can do correctly?
4. According to the author, "Foundational to forgiveness is an awareness of how we've been forgiven. The more we're able to grasp this, the more likely we'll be able to forgive others" (p. 57). How does our awareness of how much we've been forgiven by God help us in forgiving others? Why is this awareness still not enough for many people?
5. What are some of the things you learned about what forgiveness is not (pp. 59–61)? Where do you personally find comfort in this list?
6. What are some of the things you learned about what forgiveness is (pp. 61–63)? How will this alter your ability or desire to forgive more effectively?
7. Has there been a time when you have tapped into the Source of Forgiveness and found Jesus sufficient? How has that changed the impact of the scars you bear (pp. 64–65)?
8. Forgiving can be very hard work. After reading this chapter, what do you believe is your primary roadblock to forgiving others well? What is one step you can take in the direction of following the way of Jesus and being the kind of person who forgives seventy-seven times?

CHAPTER 4

Scuffed Knees

1. Describe a recent situation where you had “good” pride (p. 68).
2. Describe a time in your life when your “bad” pride (p. 68) got the best of you? How do you perceive that experience today (with humor, sadness, gratefulness, shame, etc.)? What did you learn from that event?
3. In what area of life are you most likely to fall prey to “bad” pride, which gives you an inflated view of yourself? Why do you think this aspect of your life is more vulnerable to bad pride?
4. Samson’s name had a particular meaning, as did Delilah’s (p. 72). In a sense, their names foreshadowed their destiny. What did you gain from note #7 (p. 184) that adds to your understanding of the meaning behind their names? What about you; were you given a name because it held special significance?
5. Consider the Pharisee’s prayer, discussed on p. 77. How does pride creep into church people and create gaps or divisions? When have you personally acted out or experienced this?

[Remember to be careful about identifying others.]

6. One of the pride-related gaps is the disparity between how we perceive another person and the *reality* of that person’s life (p. 78). Have you ever been afraid of what other people might think of you if they knew the truth about your life?
7. The author states on p. 82, “By downplaying the gifts you’ve been given, you are stripping God of the glory due Him because God is the one who gave you that gift. By denying the gift, you are denying God.” How did the discussion of “humility” (beginning on p. 81) help you better understand true humility and adequately own up to the gifts you’ve been given?
8. What was the most helpful, convicting or challenging aspect of the “bend the knee” section for you (beginning on p. 82)? Perhaps the questions posed on p. 87 are helpful to consider.
9. Where is God showing you to “bend your knee” without any resultant notoriety or fame? If Jesus’ life was about becoming “small,” a servant to all, where is the Lord prompting you to shrink today in your various spheres of influence and relationships?

CHAPTER 5

Designed for Struggle

1. Have you ever said in response to someone else's difficulty, "All you need is God?" What do you think about that now, in light of the author's assertion on p. 96 that we were designed for human companionship?
2. Which better describes you; lone ranger, friend magnet, or something in between? What is it about being a lone ranger (p. 98) that may predispose a person to difficulties in life? Why is being a loner tempting to some, maybe you?
3. Consider the true meaning of "helper" (*ezer*) in Genesis 2 (pp. 99–100) as something other than an add-on. If you're a woman, how does this proper translation strike you? If you're a man, how does this corrected translation change the way you think? Were you surprised to learn that *ezer* is used almost exclusively in connection to God in the Scriptures?
4. The meaning of the companion word, "suitable" in Hebrew is multi-faceted. What most surprises you about God's provision of a helper who is *kenegdo* (pp. 101–102)? If you're married, how does this new understanding shed light on your role in the relationship?
5. A key question surfaces on p. 103. In your most significant relationships, are you someone who struggles *against* or struggles *with*? If *against*, how can you move in the direction of *with*?
6. The author speaks of his own growth in embracing an *ezer kenegdo* relationship. He says, "I do not have the freedom to do whatever I want. And I am thankful for that. Because left to my own doing, I would go astray much farther and faster than what I am already prone to do" (p. 107). How do you feel about this? Are his statements appealing or threatening to you?
7. *Ezer kenegdo* relationships hold true for other important life interactions; best friends, teammates, coworkers, etc. (p. 107). How might you be limiting another's ability to fully live into their role by your own hesitancy of being questioned, challenged, or held accountable? Conversely, is it hard for you to live out that kind of role? Why?
8. If you're a parent, how might you take on a challenging parenting situation differently now with an *ezer kenegdo* role in mind (p. 108)?
9. Samson had no *ezer kenegdo* in his life. Consider these questions from p. 109 about the *ezer kenegdos* in yours; who do you struggle with that makes you better? Who have you given permission to challenge you? Who holds you accountable? Who *really knows* what's going on in your life?

CHAPTER 6

Gotta Have Blue Eyes

1. Samson's eyes, or rather, what he chose to look at and then want, led him down a path of disobedience against the God he was created to serve. What most captivates the eyes (and minds) of the current younger generation, those of middle age, and of those who are later on in life?
2. Does being right in God's eyes matter to the average person in our culture today (p. 119). What about to the average person who calls him or herself a Christian? What about to you?
3. For what percentage or period of your life could you say that you lived by the motto of doing what was right in your own eyes (p. 123)? How do those years look based on your perspective now? Does wisdom about past errors automatically ensure that we won't fall into another period of wasted or troubled years again? Why or why not?
4. There are parts of the Bible that are difficult to stomach. Judges 17–21 is one such section. What did you find most interesting about what you learned from the Samson narrative that sheds light on these last five chapters of Judges?
5. On pp. 128–129, a huge truth is spelled out. "It's easy to get caught up in the notion that our choices don't affect others. We fall prey to believing we can do what we want and it won't impact others. But it does... We're not isolated individuals who can limit our effect upon others. We're integrated beings whose lives bleed onto one another, and we impact one another positively or negatively." Where are you seeing this being played out in your life, or in the life of another? How can you live with a heightened awareness that your decisions—however ordinary or significant they are—will affect others?
6. What did you find most interesting, helpful, challenging, or nerve wracking about the role of priests in the ancient world (beginning on p. 133), and God calling His people (which includes you if you're a follower of God) to emulate this role on His behalf?
7. God asked the Israelite people to wear tassels with a blue cord on each tassel to remind them of their identity and mission. What could you do to continually remind yourself that you serve as a priest of God and what you do matters?
8. The author contends that we are all communicating a message with our lives (pp. 136–137). What message are you communicating? What message would you like to be communicating? And if there's a gap, what's one thing you can begin doing today to close that gap and live with purer blue eyes?

CHAPTER 7

Give Us What You've Got

1. In the second paragraph of this chapter, there's a stunning declaration: "Our gifts are always linked to our calling" (p. 139). What do you think about this?
2. Regarding the Philistines' origins or the David and Goliath story, what added to your understanding of the people with whom Samson was meant to utilize his gift (pp. 140-148)?
3. Try the exercise the author posed on p. 152. Take two minutes to jot down what you most appreciate about yourself. When finished, draw a divider line. Then take two minutes to write down what you most don't like about yourself. Compare together, regardless of whether you share actual items with the group. Which list is longer? What does this tell you about yourself?
4. God has not created each of us with unlimited choices, but with specific purposes that correspond with the fullest expression of our personality and talents. Think through and respond to the questions found on p. 156. Discuss whether you have used timing as an excuse not to risk being used by God, as in, "This is just not a convenient time in my life."
5. In processing the questions found on p. 157 about your individual calling, which questions were most helpful to you? As a result, what is stirring inside of you? What is God beginning to unveil to you? What has you the most excited? What has you the most apprehensive or scared? Did note #13 (p. 190) ring true for you?
6. How have you experienced gaining clarity on what God has called you to do and the gift(s) He's given you? Do you perceive it as a process of discernment, a journey of single steps rather than a destination?
7. Consider the short sections on "giving God something to bless" and "don't say 'no' until God says 'no'" (pp. 159–161). What did you find most helpful? Did these concepts change your thinking (and approach to future actions)?
8. The author contends, "You don't have to do something extravagant to be compelling. Some of the most compelling aspects of life happen in the everyday, humdrum activities and relationships" (p. 162). What does this statement do for you? How can you be compelling for Christ in this season of your life?
9. To leverage something means using it to influence or achieve a desired result. If we are to leverage our gifts for God's glory, the benefit of others, and for our joy (pp. 163–165), in which of these three areas do you need to grow the most in order to leverage your gifts more effectively?

CHAPTER 8

Hope for Faulty People

1. Has there ever been a time when you thought the Bible was largely about people who trusted God in ways you could hardly imagine, much less do, and so you felt woefully inadequate to follow God? What changed that for you?
2. In reading the litany of failures of God's people on pp. 168–169, what does it tell you about God's Word to realize that even the "heroes" all had faults and failures? How would this reality help someone who doesn't think they can relate to the Bible? Does this inclusion of faults and failures increase or decrease your confidence in the truth of the Bible?
3. The author points out that the Bible exempts no one from scrutiny (p. 170), and that "there are no sacred cows in the sacred Scriptures." Without drilling down on your own pet peeves, name a sacred cow or two that comes to mind (perhaps there are even some present within church life).
4. The author states that in the Bible, "Everyone's life, in all its goodness, rawness and brokenness, is fair game for analysis and publication" (p. 170). If your life were published under the same rubric, how would you feel? Deeply unsettled? Thrilled? Ashamed? In analyzing your thoughts, are you able to trust God with the truth of your flawed life?
5. "Hebrews 11 is not about the greatness of humanity. It's about the goodness and grace of God to use broken and faulty people to accomplish His purposes, sometimes in collaboration with their efforts, and sometimes in spite of their efforts" (p. 170). Where have you experienced this in your life?
6. The clear lesson from Samson's life is that God can use our brokenness for His glory, and most especially, that "our failures don't thwart God's plans" (p. 172). How does this truth encourage you personally? Who comes to mind that needs to hear this truth? Without mentioning names, share what you could do to tell someone else about this truth that could completely change their perspective on a burdensome failure (schedule coffee, write a note, call, etc.).
7. In Chapter 1, the author described learning that there was more to his reality than his view from the beach. There was an underwater world he had missed thus far. Yet he did not know this until another person told him and showed him where to equip himself for the deeper view. On p. 174 the question is, "What will you do with all you've seen and experienced under the sea?" In other words, what will you do with what you've learned from a deep examination of Samson's life in order to get right what he got wrong and leave a positive mark on our world?
8. Consider revisiting question #6 from Chapter 1.



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