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Practice Self-Control

Judges 16

“In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes,” says the closing description of the book of Judges. It was a time of national chaos and violence—Samson’s era. Samson was born to devout Hebrew parents who promised to give their child to God’s service. But the young adult Samson fell in love with a Philistine woman, forced both families to accept the marriage, then slaughtered thirty of his in-laws because he lost a bet. Not surprisingly, his father-in-law canceled the marriage. So Samson caught three hundred foxes, tied torches to their tails and turned them loose among the Philistines’ ripened grain fields. Self-control was not Samson’s specialty.

GROUP DISCUSSION. Describe a scene from your own memory where someone abandoned self-control.

PERSONAL REFLECTION. Think about a time when you failed to exercise self-control. How did this affect your relationships? Consider what this event says about how you regard yourself, others and God.

Samson judged Israel for twenty years. He was as close to a national leader as they had at that point. Then came a woman named Delilah. *Read Judges 16.*

1. What examples of Samson's failure to exercise self-control can you find in this text?

2. When you "see" the various escapades of Samson described in this chapter, what images come to your mind?

3. What does the event described in verses 1-4 reveal about the kind of person Samson was?

4. Review Delilah's four attempts to discover the source of Samson's strength and Samson's response to these attempts (vv. 4-22). What can you perceive about the relationship between these two people?

5. What character qualities in Samson made it possible for Delilah to keep her part of the bargain offered in verse 5?

6. Verses 20-21 describe the painful consequences Samson faced. When have you seen (or experienced) painful results due to lapses in self-control?

7. What do you see as the true explanation for Samson's strength—and weakness? (Compare Judges 16:20 with 14:6, 19; 15:14.)

8. Focus on verses 23-31. In what ways did the Philistines humiliate Samson?

9. Study the words of Samson's prayer in verse 28. What does it suggest about Samson's moral and spiritual condition?

10. Would you say that Samson put self-control to good or bad use in the ending of this story? Explain.

11. What are some of your strengths in the area of self-control?

What areas of self-control do you need to work on?

12. What steps can you take to move toward the kind of self-control that supports integrity? (Consider adjustments in relationships, circumstances, prayer or other appropriate steps.)

Pray, thanking God for the measure of self-control that he has already developed in you. Bring to him specific settings or circumstances that tempt you to a harmful loss of self-control. Ask for his help in those settings.

Now or Later

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). Thank God for these blessings from his Spirit as you see them in other Christians and in yourself. Spend a day doing a “fruit search.” Note every time you see one of these fruit in action. At the end of your day, use your list to create a prayer of praise to God.

Consider keeping a self-control journal for a week. Note times when you have exercised appropriate self-control. Note also your lapses in this area. At the end of the week, thank God for the successes and ask that he use them for his glory. Try to notice any patterns that triggered lapses in self-control. Then prayerfully consider how you might reduce temptation or strengthen your inner resolve.