

22 But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.

23 Now the rulers of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to celebrate, saying, "Our god has delivered Samson, our enemy, into our hands."

24 When the people saw him, they praised their god, saying,

"Our god has delivered our enemy
into our hands,
the one who laid waste our land
and multiplied our slain."

25 While they were in high spirits, they shouted, "Bring out Samson to entertain us." So they called Samson out of the prison, and he performed for them.

When they stood him among the pillars, **26** Samson said to the servant who held his hand, "Put me where I can feel the pillars that support the temple, so that I may lean against them." **27** Now the temple was crowded with men and women; all the rulers of the Philistines were there, and on the roof were about three thousand men and women watching Samson perform. **28** Then Samson prayed to the Lord, "Sovereign Lord, remember me. Please, God, strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes." **29** Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, **30** Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived.

31 Then his brothers and his father's whole family went down to get him. They brought him back and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. He had led Israel twenty years.

God Gives Growth

Last week I finally put up the growth chart for measuring our children's height on the wall. I know we're terrible parents because after our first child our charting of growth tapered off. We haven't been as consistent with our other children. It's been over a year since we last measured and during that time the kids grew three inches without us even noticing. In the meantime our youngest finally made her mark at over a year old. Our children are growing at a rate of 1/4" a month and we are growing less and less consistent.

Did Samson's parents do the same? He was the first child. I imagine they were fairly consistent. But Samson wasn't just any child. An angel of the Lord announced he will be a Nazarite, a very special child, a judge, one who would deliver God's people from their

enemies. Did she chart his growth? Did she watch him grow in the wisdom and knowledge of the Lord as well? There weren't many high points to his life. In fact you can't even tell that he is a Christian. We don't see any growth and he barely even makes it on the chart.

Do you think God does the same for us? Carefully monitoring our growth of his children not only physically but spiritually as well. Do you think he monitors our growth away from him? Or does it happen even without our noticing? Like 3" in one year. God is concerned even when we aren't. He carefully monitors and measures life. He graciously gives growth.

Samson set apart from birth. He is to be a Nazarite. A Nazarite is under a vow. He can't drink alcohol. He can't go near dead things or anything unclean. And he can't cut his hair for the rest of his life. No razor was to come near his head. Samson is set apart. He is going to act different and look different from the rest of the world. *He grew and the Lord blessed him, and the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him" (Judges 13:25).* Growth.

It's not that everyone was expecting him to open pickle jars but they must have been curious. Just when growth is promising Judges 14 begins with, *"I have seen a Philistine woman in Timnah; now get her for me as my wife."* Marrying outside of Israel. Instead of delivering Israel from their oppressive rulers the Philistines he wants to marry one. On the way to meet her he kills a lion. On his way back he goes out of his way to see the carcass. He comes in contact with the dead body. He eats out of it. Gave some to his father and mother - they're unclean now too. He drinks. He visits prostitutes. If he is consistent about anything he consistently breaks his Nazarite vow.

Samson is growing alright, growing away - distancing himself from God. Finally he falls for another Philistine, Delilah. *The rulers of the Philistines said to her, "See if you can lure him into showing you the secret of his strength so we may tie him up and subdue him."* So Delilah said to Samson, *"Tell me the secret of your great strength and how you can be tied up and subdued" (Judges 16:5).* Three times the Philistines rush in to subdue Samson. But Samson doesn't have a friend who would step in and say, "This is none of my business but I think she's trying to kill you." The fourth time she pleads with Samson. You think that he'd be suspicious of all these Philistines jumping up and down in Delilah's closet. But Samson has been growing further and further away from God. Growing in his pride and arrogance. Sadly he's probably even convinced himself he doesn't need God, this strength is his own.

He ... thought, "I'll go out as before and shake myself free." But, then comes the saddest verse in the Bible, *"But he did not know that the Lord had left him."* He cut God out of his life, fell from grace, and God gave him over. *And the Philistines seized him and gouged*

out his eyes and brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles. And he ground at the mill in prison.” Growth? I’m not seeing it.

In a similar way we too are set apart at our baptism when we are claimed by God, called into his family, and set apart for service to him. At our confirmation we make a vow, a pledge to carry out our calling as Christians with the help of God. God then equips us with time, talents and gifts to carry our cross and follow him. We are to be different, act different than the rest of the world.

That’s about the only similarity we have with Samson right? Or is there more? We have not taken Nazarite vows. We’re free to drink, cut our hair, and come in contact with death. We haven’t visited prostitutes. But maybe we have been more interested in what we want to do rather than what God would have us do. Go our own way. Do our own thing. Grow further and further from the church, God, one another.

Maybe we are more like Samson than we thought. We each have an ego, a pride that gets in the way, tell us, “I don’t need anyone. I’m strong in the faith.” Maybe we ignore a concerned brother’s advice, “I think this sin is trying to kill you.” I’ve gotten through this before. I can handle it. I don’t need God. That’s when Paul warning really hits home, “*Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you*” (Romans 12:3). Don’t think you’re too strong to fall, too mature to grow. Pride only blinds and enslaves us to grind grain of sin. Often I wonder if God can see any growth in me.

Samson just like us. Samson is not a type of Christ. He is a type of Israel, a picture of the human race.

If we think we are better than Samson we’d better take a moment and look at the struggles he went through. He’s betrayed by everyone he’s ever known. His wife reveals his riddle. His wife is then given to another man. The Philistines burn her and her family to death. Then 3,000 of his own country men, those he serves over as judge, turn on him and hand him over to the Philistines. Then the only other woman he gives his heart to sells his secret for a sum of money. The sad truth is that he never had a friend who would stop him and say, “I think she’s trying to kill you.”

The life of Samson is a struggle. To the very end when his eyes are gouged out and he is put in prison to grind grain. But there is a minor detail that the author doesn’t want us to overlook, “*the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved*” (Judges 16:22). The Philistines were not standing by to chart his growth. God gave growth. God

humbled his servant. Samson went through some serious growing pains. Samson calls out, *"Oh Sovereign Lord, Remember me!"* And we rejoice because he calls on the LORD. Samson is not asking God to think of him. **He's not asking him to keep me in mind but to remember someone means to have mercy, to deliver.** Samson placed his trust no longer in himself. He realized that without God he was nothing.

God remembered Samson just as *God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark. God remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of Sodom.* God remembered Samson. If only he would have stopped there because Samson's prayer demonstrates there is room for growth. *Please, God, strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes" (Judges 16:28)* God grants him strength because God also remembered his people Israel. Samson kills more in one moment than he did in the previous 20 years combined.

God delivered them from the Philistines through Samson. Judges isn't so much a story about Samson but about God. A God who is faithful when his people are faithless. God sent his Son who was nothing like Israel. He lived a perfect life. The Father looked down lovingly on his son and proudly announced, *"This one is my Son the one I love."* He was perfectly obedient to his Father's will and yet he was betrayed for a whole lot less. Jesus did not cry out for vengeance but instead asked for forgiveness. He then gave his life so others might live. Jesus remembered the criminal he was crucified with. Jesus is quite the opposite of Samson because of this the last words spoken of about Samson are not, *"Let me die with the Philistines,"* But *what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, ... These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. (Hebrews 11:32,39,40)* Growth!

Thank God we aren't in Samson's position. Thank God that he remembers his people even when they forget. Thank God for the church, the brothers and sisters. We deserve to be forgotten because of all the evil we do. For us to ask God, "Remember me." Is just as ridiculous as Samson. But then you realize we are the ones for whom Christ died. How could God forget those he had his one and only son die for. How could he forget us? He's forgiven our pride, arrogance, and growth away from him.

God remembers us. He brings us to faith and keeps us in the faith. He also grants growth. **He charts it carefully so that whether weak like Samson or strong like Paul we have a savior who saves not based on the strength of our faith but based on the object of our faith, the strength of our Savior: Jesus.** Samson destroyed the enemies of

Israel. Jesus destroys the enemies of mankind. Sin, death, and the devil are bound by God's Word.

No matter how much we have grown, there is still room for more. No matter how mature we are, we never stop maturing. Growth is a lifelong endeavor—not just one reserved for the kids. Remain firmly founded in his Word. Remain among the church. Remember that growth is a gracious gift from God.

It's not something you can measure or chart on the wall. It's not like the growth chart that we inconsistently fill out with the children. It's much more than that as our God lovingly looks over his children he sees them grow. He sees them stand and start to walk but when they stumble he doesn't throw his hands up, "He's lame. He's a cripple. He's no use to me might as well put him down" He graciously gives growth. Like a father holding our hands he helps us walk, leading us in paths of his righteousness, both watching and giving us growth.

Amen.