

Samson: A Stranger to Himself

by Firdaus Salim



Samson and Deliah by José Echenagusia Errazquin

“Forever I shall be a stranger to myself.”

In 1942, a French author named Albert Camus wrote a book called *The Myth of Sisyphus*. The book is essentially about a search for meaning. In the first chapter of the book, when Camus was trying to understand human being, he admitted that he didn't even really know himself. He then wrote this line, “Forever I shall be a stranger to myself.”

Background of the Story

When I was little, the story of Samson was told so many times in the Sunday school. As a child, I simply took the story as it is without questions. In my mind, Samson was like that green muscular guy on TV that I used to watch. At that time, I used to watch The

Incredible Hulk on TV and thought that the story of Samson somehow sounded like a fairy tale, like a fiction. It was when I grew up that a dozen of questions started to come to my mind. What did exactly happen to Samson? My ultimate question was: Why did this person, who was such a great hero with such a great power, have to end up in such a tragic way?

A Judge and a Nazirite

From the data in the Bible, some Bible scholars estimate that Samson lived in the tenth century B.C. (1105 – 1085 B.C.), or ten centuries before Christ. The “judges” in the book of Judges were not public officials in state courts as we know today. They did perform judicial function at times, such as resolving disputes among their people but they also took roles as military and civil leaders.

In addition to being a judge, Samson was chosen by God to be a *Nazirite*. A Nazirite means someone who is *set apart*, someone who is devoted, consecrated to God. There is a set of regulation on how to live as a Nazirite. The book of Numbers chapter six sets some rules for Nazirites to follow. First, he is to be abstain from drinking wine and fermented drinks. Second, he is to be abstain from shaving off his hair. Third, he

must avoid getting in contacts with dead bodies. These are the rules that applied to Samson. But, there's something unique about Samson that separates him from other Nazirites. The book of Numbers chapter 6 says that someone could opt to be a Nazirite only for a certain period of time. If someone vowed to be a Nazirite only for a period of a year, then these rules apply upon him only for such period. But Samson was different, he was meant to be a Nazirite for a life time. He was to be a Nazirite *for one purpose*. Chapter 13 verse 5 tells us the purpose of Samson's life, that he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines who had oppressed them for 40 years. This is Samson's life-mission as a Nazirite. He was born for this purpose. He was born for this goal.

Star Egocentricity

When he grew up, Samson turned out to be a very self-centered person. He fell in love with a Philistine woman and insisted his parents to let him marry her. But it violated God's law because at that time God forbid the Israelites to marry the non-Israelites. Samson's parents knew about this and didn't agree with him. But Samson insisted. This is what Samson said to his parents,

“Get her for me. She's the right one for me.” (Jdg. 14:3)

Even Samson's parents could not control him. His parents couldn't deal with Samson's self-centeredness. Samson was highly egocentric. He was highly self-centered.

A psychologist named Fritz Kunkel says that there are several types of egocentricity and one of them is called “Star.” Someone with this type of egocentricity sees the world rotating around him for his own benefit, which is to make him a star. He tends to see himself as an object of admiration, as an object of adoration by the people around him. Someone with this ego type always have a constant need to be on the top, to be adored, to be admired. And Samson fits precisely with this profile.

First Case of Samson's Star

Egocentricity: His Riddle to 30 Men.

At his wedding party, among his 30 male companions, Samson's “star” egocentricity became visible. Among the 30 men, Samson wanted to be a star. So, he gave them a riddle to solve in seven days. He was being playful with them. He made a bet with them because he wanted to be a winner. He wanted to be the center of attention and wanted to be an attraction.

But Samson lost the bet because his wife revealed the answer to the them.

The problem is, a *star* egocentric person cannot accept a loss. Samson could not accept a loss and humiliation. As such, he became very angry. The Book of Judges chapter 14 verse 13 says that he was *burned* with anger. He killed 30 people, robbed their clothes to give to the thirty men who won the bet. And in his burning anger, Samson simply left his wife. He irresponsibly left his wife.

When he tried to return to his wife again, his father-in-law apparently already gave her to marry someone else. Samson couldn't accept rejection. He was once again burned with anger. This time, using three hundred foxes that were put in pairs, he put torches on their tails in order to burn the farms of the Philistines. Later, Samson attacked viciously and slaughtered many of the Philistines. Further, he killed a thousand men with a jawbone of a donkey. His anger was uncontrollable. He could not control his anger. He was a beast.

Second Case of Samson's Star

Egocentricity: His Relationship with God

How Samson treated God was also apparently egocentric. After killing a thousand men, Samson became thirsty. A

star egocentric person sees people around him to serve him because he is the center of attention. And for Samson, so is God. God was there to serve him. In his thirst, this is what he shouted to God,

“You have given your servant this great victory.”

Samson admitted that he was a servant of God, but this is what he also shouted to God,

“Must I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised (the non-Israelites)?”

Falling into the hands of the non-Israelites (Philistines) would be a humiliation for Samson and would imply that God was powerless. So, Samson required that God met his needs so that he did not fall into the hands of the enemies. He asked for water from God and treated God as if He was under an obligation to serve him. Samson saw God in a very self-centered way. God was there to serve him, to serve his needs, to satisfy him, to give him what he wanted. Regardless, God didn't condemn him. God gave him water to drink.

Third Case of Samson's Star

Egocentricity: His Relationship with Delilah.

The egocentricity of Samson became even clearer when he was in a relationship with Delilah. As a star egocentric type of person, Samson constantly needed people to admire him. When he was with Delilah, Samson enjoyed the fact that Delilah was his admirer. When Delilah begged him to tell her the secret of his strength, being a star egocentric person, Samson would have enjoyed it. This is what Delilah begged to Samson in chapter 16:6,

“Tell me the secret of your great strength.”

For Samson, this beg from Delilah is actually an acknowledgement of his power. Samson needed someone who could cling onto him, who could admire and adore him; and Delilah acted exactly as this person. And Delilah went on saying,

“and how you can be tied up and subdued.”

A star egocentric person would see this as a challenge, as an opportunity to showcase, and to prove his greatness and power. So, Samson enjoyed being thirsted over by Delilah for his strength. Delilah knew about this and used it to exploit Samson four times. Three times she followed Samson’s advice to tie him with different materials. The first one was with

seven bowstrings that had not been dried. The second one was with new ropes that had never been used. The third time, she tied Samson’s hair into fabric on the loom and tightened it with a pin. But all these attempts failed to weaken Samson.

On the fourth attempt, Delilah said the following words to Samson, (16:15),

“How can you say ‘I love you’ when you won’t confide in me?

This is the third time you have made a fool of me and haven’t told me the secret of your great strength.”

So, Delilah kept showing her admiration for the strength of Samson. And the Bible says that Delilah kept nagging on Samson for days for the secret of his strength. Delilah acted as a clinging person. She played a role of someone who suffered from her pitifulness and needed to be pitied by Samson. She acted as if she suffered from Samson’s distrust of her and demanded pity from him. If her pitifulness is not met, she will aggravate it even more. Fritz Kunkel says that a clinging person will be “arousing the pity and responsibility of her protector.” (Fritz Kunkel, *What Do You Advise?* p. 45). So, Delilah puts Samson as someone who is responsible to ease her pitifulness and suffering.

The act of clinging will sooner or later make the person whom she clings onto gets tired. This is what exactly happened with Samson. The Bible says that Samson was eventually tired to death. After days of nagging, Samson got tired and he gave in. He finally revealed the secret of his strength to Delilah because he felt obligated to ease her pitifulness and suffering. In the end, Samson revealed the secret of his power: His unshaved hair. Delilah then had him sleep on her lap and had someone shaved his hair. When Samson lost his hair, he broke his Nazirite rule. As the result, he lost his God-given strength. He was no longer a man devoted to God. He was no longer a man consecrated to God. God took away his power. He was captured by the Philistine, was put in prison, was tied up and put into a force-labor where he worked at a grinding mill in prison. Working at a grinding mill was a humiliation because at that time, it was a job done by a slave or a woman. For Samson, he was humiliated to the bottom - to the lowest level. He was in the abyss, precisely being the opposite of a star.

From one perspective, we can see that God used Samson despite his egocentricity. Even though his egocentricity led him to marry a Philistine

woman which violated God's law of marriage, but somehow God used him to fight the Philistines and defeated many of them. Even though Samson's egocentricity led him to stay with Delilah, but by the end of his life, when he was captured by the Philistines and pushed the pillars of the Philistines' temple and died, God used him to defeat even more Philistines, more than when he was alive. Thus, in spite of his many wrong motives and actions, even though Samson only cared about his own interests and motives, God used him.

But something troubles me: The task of delivering the people of Israel from the hands of the Philistines were not finished when Samson died. It was Samuel, who later completed the task of defeating the Philistines. The book of First Samuel chapter 7 tells us the later story when Samuel totally subdued the Philistines. So, Samson's task was unfinished when he died. It's true that God used him not to complete, instead, to begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines. But still, he could have been used by God more effectively for that task. With his power and God-gifted strength, Samson had so much potential to be used by God so effectively but he wasted it. He wasted his great potential.

How Samson's Story is Relevant to Us

Samson's story is relevant to us because even though we are not Nazirites like Samson, still we are instruments of God. It's what Paul says in the letter of 2 Timothy 2:21. If someone cleanses himself, "he will be an *instrument* for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master, and prepared to do any good work." So, Paul was saying to Timothy that he was to be a vessel of God, who is set apart, who is holy, so that he could keep himself *usable* for the Lord. This statement from Paul to Timothy also applies to us. We are set apart, to keep ourselves usable for the Lord. On this verse, John Calvin in his commentary says that we are to cleanse ourselves because we are also "set apart..." which means that we are also devoted, consecrated. We are set apart for honorable and magnificent purposes. We are to live a holy life to glorify God.

It is true that Samson failed to live his life as a Nazirite. But what I think so ironic about Samson is not the fact that he was deceived, lost his power and died too early. These are all ironic, but I don't think that these are the most ironic parts about Samson. What I think the most ironic part about Samson is that: Samson *wasn't aware* of who he was. He didn't really

know himself. He didn't know what kind of person he was. He wasn't aware of his own egocentricity. He wasn't aware of his own tendencies, that he was a star type of person who needed admiration, who needed adoration. He wasn't aware that he was a star type of person who needed certain needs to be met and he needed those *gratifications*. That's why he was exploited by Delilah. Delilah knew him better than himself. The author of the book of Judges wrote about Samson and Delilah in a such a way that we, as readers, know about Samson better he knew than himself. So, Samson wasn't *conscious* of himself. He lived *unconscious* of himself. He simply *sleepwalked* throughout his life, not knowing himself.

We probably have many things in common with Samson. Like Samson, we might not be conscious of who we are. We might not be conscious of our tendencies and weaknesses. We might not be conscious of the dark shadows that are within us. In some ways, we probably have no idea about our own egocentricity. Some of us, like Samson, without being aware and without knowing why, have the needs for admiration, for being adored, for being the center of attention. On the contrary, some of us avoid these. Some of us avoid being the center of attention and prefer to

hide and become invisible. This is like Moses who wanted to avoid taking a responsibility in his life. Meanwhile, some others have the needs for authority and power and always feel threatened. Not understanding why, they are uneasy with themselves until they could gain authority and power. This is what happened to Saul when he was threatened by David. And some others prefer to cling onto others, to let others control them and take responsibility for them.

There are so many things that we don't realize about ourselves. John Sanford, a Christian psychologist, once said that,

“One is always in the dark about one's own personality.” (John Sanford, *The Invisible Partners*).

And unfortunately, according to John Sanford, “human beings are readily possessed by they-know-not-what within them.” (John Sanford, *The Invisible Partners*).

We are possessed by what we do not know about ourselves. We know that we are not to be proud of ourselves and that we are not to lose control of ourselves, but somehow, we act compulsively according to our egocentric pattern. We are driven by what we are not conscious of about ourselves.

On being the instruments of God, John Calvin said that it is true that we are called to holiness; however, such calling and duty is *totally different* from the question about our power or ability. It means that the calling and duty of Christians to holiness are one thing but our power or ability to do is a different thing. This means we need to struggle against ourselves, against the broken parts of ourselves. The Westminster Confession of Faith says the following about the broken parts of ourselves,

“This sanctification is throughout in the whole man, yet imperfect in this life; there abideth still some *remnants of corruption in every part.*” (The Westminster

Confession of Faith, Chap. 13 v.2)

So, we have *remnants of corruption* in every part of ourselves, to deal with.

According to John Sanford, a way to deal with ourselves is to *become aware* of ourselves. If Samson had known that he had this certain egocentric pattern, if he had known that he had certain needs to be admired and to be adored, he would've understood himself better; he would've been more conscious of his own tendencies and pattern. Also, he would've been able to anticipate himself from seeking gratifications. Only when we are

conscious of our egocentric pattern, we will be able to deal with it.

Back to Camus

Going back to where we begin, I think Albert Camus had a good point when he said the following,

“Forever I shall be a stranger to myself.”

Getting to know ourselves is a non-stop process. It’s a process of a lifetime. Even until the end, we will still have some parts about ourselves that we don’t understand.

But we keep doing the process of sanctification, trying to understand ourselves and our weaknesses.

Samson’s life is tragic mostly not because he lost his power. I think his life is tragic because he lived *an unconscious* life, an unexamined life. He just *sleepwalked* through it, unconscious of himself. Samson’s life was tragic because *he was a complete stranger* to himself.

A 17th century English poet named John Milton wrote a poem about Samson called “Samson Agonistes.” This is what Milton says about Samson, which I paraphrase,

“You (Samson) have become a prison of your own self.
Your soul is imprisoned in the darkness of the body.”

According to Milton, Samson’s soul is imprisoned in the darkness of his body, in the corruptness of his body.

In our struggle to live as instruments of God, it is true that our sins have been forgiven and pardoned. It is true that we have been justified before God because Romans 3:23-24 states that,

“all who have sinned and fall short of the glory of God are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”

Thus, if we have been born again, although we have sins and weaknesses, we have been justified by faith. God has pardoned all our sins. But that’s not the end of the journey. We don’t just want to be forgiven and die by giving in to our weaknesses or to give in to the corruptness of our body. We want to be used by God optimally. We want to live as best as we can. And therefore, we constantly struggle to overcome ourselves. We struggle to be conscious of who we truly are so that gradually we become *less a stranger* to ourselves. We struggle to be conscious of who we truly are so that we do not *sleepwalk* our lives away. We struggle to be conscious of who we truly are so that we can be *kept useful as instruments* of God.

Reflection section

by Sarah Larkin

Further Scriptures to meditate on

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” Ephesians 2: 10

“Search me, God, and know my heart;
Put me to the test and know my anxious thoughts;
And see if there is any hurtful way in me,
And lead me in the everlasting way.”
Psalm 139: 23-24

“But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. For this reason it says,
‘Awake, sleeper,
And arise from the dead,
And Christ will shine on you.’”
Ephesians 5: 13-14

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came so that they would have life, and have it abundantly.” John 10: 10

Questions for reflection

Kunkel said there are four types of egocentricity - the star (who needs to be admired), the turtle (who withdraws), the clinging vine (who is dependent) and the nero (who is a bully).

- Can you identify your own egocentric pattern?
Kunkel said that you can overcome your egocentricity by having We experiences.
- Can you think of what a We experience would be for you today?
- What would living more optimally mean for you?
- Can you think of one action that would be a step in that direction?

Prayer

Father, thank you that you have forgiven all my sins and that through Jesus I have a new life. Help me to grow in awareness of my egocentricity and weaknesses so that I can grow as your disciple and live out of the abundant life you call me to. In Jesus name. Amen.