

## Victory of the Lamb – June 10, 2018 - Ordinary People Extraordinary God

### Judges 16:1-22 On Step At a Time Pastor Bill Limmer

#### Limmer Family story

Natalie worked faithfully for the same small business for over ten years. She did a little bit of everything at her job. One of her jobs at the business was bookkeeping. Things were going great until one day when there was a financial pinch in the family. Natalie, reasoning, that she had worked hard and long over the years, that she deserved it, decided to help herself to a little bit of company money to help make ends meet to the end of the month, at which time she would willingly and gladly pay back the money she had taken. And so she did – take the money. And so she did – repay the money. A couple of months later the same situation arose where she needed a little extra money to make it to the end of the month. And she promised herself she would pay it back at the end of the month just like the first time. And she did. A few months later, the scenario played itself out again. Only this time when the end of the month came, she could not pay all the money back, so she paid some of it back leaving an outstanding balance of stolen funds. And the cycle continued. Her IOUs continued to grow. And then there was Christmas time and vacation time and the debt really grew. One day the owner called in outside auditor.. And the walls caved in on Natalie. Her lust for money, although she wouldn't have probably called it that at the beginning, led her to be charged and found guilty of embezzlement. She led herself away from her company, from her family, from God, one step at a time. One step at a time.

Samson was a well-respected church-goer but he had some sin issues too. He was filled with pride over his strength and wit, and with lust, lust for women. Judges 16:1-2 **One day Samson went to Gaza, where he saw a prostitute. He went in to spend the night with her. <sup>2</sup>The people of Gaza were told, “Samson is here!” So they surrounded the place and lay in wait for him all night at the city gate.** Samson, Israel's judge, took a step into Gaza, that's like the capital of the Philistine territory, so he is already playing with fire. And he takes another step by spending part of the night with a prostitute. His enemies are very aware that he is there. And they quickly make plans to kill him. But Samson out-smarted them and gets up in the middle of the night and leaves. Safe, right. But you have heard that one thing leads to another right. And it did. One thing led to another. Which leads him a woman named Delilah and a relationship of convenience, lust, power, and greed. And you thought these things were just on TV.

Judges 16:4-5 **Some time later, he fell in love with a woman in the Valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah. <sup>5</sup>The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, “See if you can lure him into showing you the secret of his great strength and how we can overpower him so we may tie him up and subdue him. Each one of us will give you eleven hundred shekels<sup>[a]</sup> of silver.”** So while he it says he fell in love with her, it became lust. We sometimes get those definitions mixed up today too. We know it was lust and not love because this relationship was self-serving for both of them. Oh, their paths might have crossed from time to time, when they met the other ones needs but it was only because they were first meeting their own need. And Samson continued to be entangled by sins of pride over his strength and smarts, and lust. And Delilah was entangled with sins of lust and money, and in her case mostly money.

Judges 16:6 **So Delilah said to Samson, “Tell me the secret of your great strength and how you can be tied up and subdued.”** And so, this begins a back and forth where the two will try to use each other. Delilah is in it for the money. And for Samson, it's about the conquest of the girl and the country by his body and his brain. Three different times Delilah sets Samson up so she can get paid the sum of about

30 years wages, set for life. Three times Samson will lie about what gives him his strength. Samson by his lies, is able to toy with Delilah and prove he is smarter than she is and the Philistines. Delilah knows she is getting used but she also reasons if she can just get the money it will be all worth it. This is how it went: Judges 16:15-17 **Then she said to him, "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."** <sup>16</sup> **With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was sick to death of it.** <sup>17</sup> **So he told her everything. "No razor has ever been used on my head," he said, "because I have been a Nazirite dedicated to God from my mother's womb. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man."** She pleads and begs and accusing him of not loving her, which they both knew never really was the case or if it was that was long gone because it is all about me. And Samson tires of the constant and nagging and is full of bravado and figures he can escape from danger no matter what and so he finally tells her the truth about his strength.

Judges 16:18-21 **When Delilah saw that he had told her everything, she sent word to the rulers of the Philistines, "Come back once more; he has told me everything."** **So the rulers of the Philistines returned with the silver in their hands.** <sup>19</sup> **After putting him to sleep on her lap, she called for someone to shave off the seven braids of his hair, and so began to subdue him.** <sup>20</sup> **And his strength left him.** <sup>20</sup> **Then she called, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" He awoke from his sleep and thought, "I'll go out as before and shake myself free."** **But he did not know that the LORD had left him.** <sup>21</sup> **Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes and took him down to Gaza. Binding him with bronze shackles, they set him to grinding grain in the prison.** Samson assumed that his disobedience to God would never cost him. But now, the one who had earlier in his life had killed 1000 Philistines with the jaw bone of a donkey is now acting like a donkey going around in blind circles grinding grain. Samson didn't fall into this mess all at once, but he made a mess out of his life one step at a time. He didn't think his that his stepping away from God would cost him.

Some of you right now are struggling. Where are you stepping away from God? When we step away from God, it is like stepping into dog poo, except that it is actually much worse? Are you stepping away from God in anger? Anger displayed on social media, anger at your spouse, anger revealed in sarcastic discussions? Pride in your accomplishments, intellect, position? Maybe like Samson you are stepping away from God in lust. Jesus said, (Matthew 5:28) **But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.** And ladies, know it goes both ways. Are you lusting after someone at work, in the neighborhood, at your kids baseball or soccer practice? Are you stepping away from God by what you are allowing yourself to be entertained by from books to tv shows to songs? Maybe your stepping away from God in greed, like Delilah. Putting your family and your worship on the back burner so you can go pick up a few more hours because as the saying goes, "I owe, I owe, so off to work I go." Or you stepping away from God by gossiping? Satan likely will not tell us at first conversation to go out and kill someone but he may lead us to gossip and so destroy our co-worker or neighbor and unknowingly to us our own heart as well. Are you stepping away from God by what you are consuming from prescribed drugs to street drugs? Stepping away by judgmentalism? You can see the speck of sin in someone's else's eye(life0 but you can't see the plank in your own eye (life). Are you stepping away by playing grace – I can sin because I'm going to be forgiven anyway. Some of you, you are like Samson, it is ok. I can handle it. I deserve it. It won't go too far. You wonder like so many do, how far can I go and not sin. That's the wrong question. The better question is how close can I get to God who loves me like none other?!

The devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. We have all played with fire and rationalized our sin. We assumed our disobedience wouldn't cost us. Satan will work on our hearts

and demand perfection that we don't have in others and lead us to rationalize our sin – at least I didn't do that. Our sinful nature pleads with us, begs with us, more intensely than Delilah did with Samson to get us to take even just a small step away from God. It is a daily battle. And we have all (Isaiah) 53:6 **turned to our own way.**

I want you to know when you and I take a step away from God, one step is too far. But I want you to know, however far your steps have gone from God it is not too far. **We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.** Jesus was taunted in your place. Jesus paid the price for our disobedient steps, thoughts, words, actions, and attitudes. Jesus took a step out of heaven and into the manger in Bethlehem. Jesus took a step off the ground onto the cross to pay for all our sins. Jesus stepped out of the grave victoriously to give us new and eternal life. And while we are waiting for eternal life with God on our side and living in us we can take steps to God.

For Samson it began like this: <sup>22</sup> **But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.** A new day was coming for Samson. God was going to shine in and through him again. Next week we are going to look at failing forward and if you have ever failed like I have this will be a message for you. In the meantime this week you can start making some steps not away from God but to God. Here are some steps to God: Admit your weakness, confess your sins. Receive your forgiveness. Pray your will be done not mine, coffee and Christ moment, put others first. This week on social media I will have Sammi or I post prayers, scripture readings and ideas to serve your neighbor. Feel free to join the conversation and take steps to God.