

Samson: A Man After His Own Heart

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[0 : 00] Today, we've had quite a number of people who share God's Word up on the stage. But today we have somebody who most of you know.

Jeremy is going to come and share God's Word to us. And some of you will know Jeremy because he's up the front leading us in some worship much of the time. But also you may not know that he's also very involved with a lot of the stuff that goes on behind the scenes in terms of the mission outreach to poor neighborhoods that we're involved with, to connecting organizations and people together.

And so he's going to come and share some of God's Word to us. So let me just pray for us, for him. And yeah, Father, thank you that your Word is powerful.

Thank you that even though your Word sometimes seems crazy, it seems like so different from what we're used to, yet your Word is like a two-edged sword which is to cut us to the heart.

Pray for Jeremy now as he speaks to us. I pray for our own hearts that you'd give us soft hearts to hear your Word and to listen to you and to obey you. Thank you in your name.

[1 : 11] Amen. All right. Here we are. How's the weather doing for everybody?

I don't think I've seen a morning of sunshine in a while. I was like rudely awakened this morning at about maybe 6 or 7 a.m.

I don't even remember. But I have an air conditioner that kind of sticks out, not inside. So, you know, when things hit it, it makes a noise. And it felt like this morning maybe the person above us, you know, had a fit of rage and decided they hated carbs and started emptying bags of rice onto my air con.

And it just woke me right up and it was just like hail. I didn't know what it was. And, yeah, so this weather is not happy for me. But it's good.

It's good to preach from the Word because I honestly think that I'm just pointing me and I'm pointing us to the Word of God. You know, it's fundamentally I'm not making this up, hopefully.

[2 : 13] I'm not a motivational speaker, so I haven't kind of come up with this material on our own. You know, the fact that we took such a long passage of Scripture. And if you've noticed the last few weeks, they have been long passages of Scripture.

But these stories about the judges, they're telling us something important. And so we really want to kind of get into the Word and into the Scriptures. And we live in an age of unprecedented access to information.

You know, iPhones or Google, Android, you know, if that floats your boat. iPads, Internet. Even, I think some of you guys still have physical Bibles lying around too.

But, you know, there was a time not too long ago in history where God's people actually didn't have their own access to the Word. So, you know, this is really a privilege, I think, to be able to dig into the Word yourself.

So I encourage you, you know, go home tonight, read the entire passage, see how the story escalates after Samson, you know, has this fit of rage and murders a bunch of Philistines, and continue letting God speak to you through His Word.

[3 : 20] If you've been doing that regularly already, then that's great. You can shut off now. You don't have to listen to me anymore. But, you know, if you're anything like me, and you're anything like the people I think I've met in life, I think we're constantly forgetting that who God is, certain attributes of God, you know.

And I think I find myself at any point in time, my heart is overemphasizing a certain attribute of God or underemphasizing. And they might be, you know, perfectly true things about God, but if I'm only just focusing on this one thing over and over again, this develops a very kind of skewed view of God

and a skewed theology.

So I just think it's great that when we get together as a church, when we dig through the Word together, He's drawing us back to seeing Him in all of His beauty, all this splendor.

It's a chance for, I think, the Word of God to remind us and for us to remind each other as you continue talking about it, what is it that we might have forgotten? And I really believe this morning, every single one of us here is something that God wants to remind us about Him, something that He wants to teach you about Him.

So for me, you know, when I reread a story like Samson, that we just read, the first thing that strikes me is like, whoa, you know, this is not that storybook Samson that I learned about in Sunday school when I was a kid, right?

[4 : 48] I mean, who here has kind of learned about Samson before in some shape or form or maybe sung a song about him? Anyone? Yeah, come on, you know who you are. Does anyone want to sing the songs that they learned about Samson when they were kids?

But I look at this and I forget every time I read it because I do it once in a while. I'm like, he was actually a pretty lousy character. You know, this ain't the stuff that children's songs are actually really made of.

We're having VBS this week with the kids, and I encourage you guys to pray about that and think about it. But if you're a volunteer here and you're planning to serve this week, you know, my challenge to you, try and write a children's song that is actually accurately based on the scripture that we just read, you know?

It'll be challenging, you know? Childish, immature, violent, you know, just very indulgent, disobedient to parents, you know, womanizing sex addicts.

You know, that's Samson. And so I think when we look at that in sort of his true color, you know, a couple weeks ago we learned about Gideon, and Graham was talking about Gideon having warts and all.

[6 : 03] You just see this complete picture of who Samson is. He was not a paragon of virtue. He was not a model, a role model by any measure.

But hold on a sec here. When we kind of take a step back and we look at the society, the context in which Samson was growing up, I think we can actually start to understand, maybe, and maybe even sympathize with them.

Maybe why did Samson turn out the way he did? So chapter 13, verse 1, we start from the top right there that Chris just read wonderfully.

It says, The Israelites again did evil in the sight of the Lord. And what happened? They ended up being ruled by the Philistines for 40 years.

And as we've gone through this series on Judges, we're in our fourth week right now, you might have noticed a pattern in these scripture readings over the last few weeks, you know, with Jephthah, with Gideon.

[7 : 04] There's this pattern that we see. God's people turn away from him. Turn away from him. They turn to all these idols from the Canaanite culture and religion around them.

And then God comes and graciously disciplines them by actually giving them in to these oppressive people. And he kind of gives in to them and delivers them into these hands of the four nations.

And the Israelites are like, What have we done? We're enslaved. And they cry out. They're distressed. They say, God, help us. And then God graciously raises up a judge to save them.

But look at the beginning of chapter 13. You notice something different? The cycle is broken.

Because this time, the Israelites don't cry out for help. They don't think they're in distress.

The story of Judges is that God is actually faithfully saving his people again and again. But in the entire book, they're on this downward spiral.

[8 : 06] And we get to this point now where they're so integrated and so absorbed into the Canaanite culture around them that they don't even know that they're enslaved. They just want the status quo.

It's complete apathy. And some scholars even think that maybe within a few generations, the Israelite sort of nation and culture would have disappeared altogether because they were getting completely absorbed into the culture surrounding them.

And this Canaanite culture, you know, in general and simple terms, was about all these different gods that people, they served. But they served them in the belief that the gods would actually bless

them.

So, for example, you know, having sex with the temple prostitutes in Canaanite religion was often seen as a ritual. And that connected them to bring fertility to the land or to other things.

Even children were killed and sacrificed as last week, if you remember, the story of Jephthah, very tragic. Child sacrifice, human sacrifice was not uncommon.

[9 : 13] It was a violent culture, as we just read. Chapter 14, verse 15, you know, the Philistines threatened to kill their own people just to get what they want, those 30 men.

And if you continue to read on, you find that they ended up, they did burn Samson's wife and her father. So, in essence, that culture, this Canaanite culture, was about doing what's right in your own eyes by their own standard.

And sadly, that's how the Israelites are actually described by the time you reach the end of the book of Judges. It says, every man did what was right in his own eyes.

Their actions were governed by the goal that everything they did, they had to get something in return. They were willing to sacrifice a lot and even hurt the people around them in order and in the name of pursuing something greater.

That's the Canaanite culture that Samson grew up in. And it had spread through all of Israel. You know, there were Philistine settlements everywhere. And his parents, you know, in the opening account, his parents, although they appear to be relatively godly people, they also display some characteristics of that Canaanite influence.

[10 : 32] You know, in their interaction with the angel, you know, when you read closely and kind of parse through it, there's some spiritual dullness in the fact that they fail to recognize, especially Manoah, the father, that this is the angel of the Lord.

This is literally God's presence before them. And it takes so long for them to really kind of get to that. It kind of reminds us of Gideon when he was asking for more signs and more signs and more signs.

The mother, the angel had to explicitly remind her that you have to stay away from this ceremonially unclean food, you know, which suggests there's a general disregard all throughout culture because it should have been just the norm to stay away from this ceremonially unclean food.

It should have just been commonplace. But he had to remind her of that. God had given his people these laws for a reason.

And this has a lot to do with this special identity that the Israelites have been called to. So why about this ceremonially unclean food? Why did she have to abstain from it?

[11 : 39] God's people had given them a special identity. In his graciousness, he had chose this people of Israel and made a promise to them to set them apart. And he says, be holy, for I am holy.

Be holy, Israel, because I am holy. And there was this calling on them was to worship God and to reflect God's amazing character through developing this society.

And this society was to be established on God's attributes, you know, his love, his justice, his mercy. A genuine concern for human dignity.

This was the calling, the identity that was graciously given to Israel. And, you know, human dignity, guys, and human rights, it's just another reason that I personally believe, you know, one of the many reasons why I personally believe that God, the one true God, there's one true creator and he's real.

Because, you know, I've worked in, having worked in like the legal field and in human rights, you read documents like the UN's Declaration of Human Rights. And it says, you know, you have words like inherent dignity and worth of a person.

[12 : 51] And don't get me wrong, that's great. And it sounds great on paper. But I think unless there's this transcendent, God-given moral absolute that says, this really is how I created you because people are made in my image.

Honestly, if you don't have that, I think those words are really open to interpretation. I think the Philistines probably would have disagreed with the UN. Because they would have said, well, yeah, the human beings are worth something, but they're also worth sacrificing on an altar to our gods because we believe that we need that for God to bless us.

I think they would have disregarded that. So the Israelites were called to be this light in this dark world, this calling, this identity on them.

And similarly, when we read the story of Samson, he's kind of like a microcosm of that. He's kind of like a small individual example of what was going on in Israel on the whole.

So this identity of the Nazarite that we read about, that's very important. It's based on the book of Numbers, chapter 6, verse 1. And Tim Keller does a really, I think, really great summary of what the Nazarite identity and the vow was all about.

[14:15] He said the purpose of the Nazarite vow was to ask God for special help during a crucial time. And if you notice what the angel said, there was three kind of rules, three stipulations that came with it.

He said, keep your hair uncut, basically. Don't drink anything made from vines. So, you know, wine would be a really great example. And lastly, don't have any contact with any dead body.

And there was some purpose, some meaning behind this. The first two, the not cutting hair and not drinking wine, it shows that you are really focused and pursuing a goal, a special purpose.

Because wine, for example, it was meant to be enjoyed. It was a good thing, and it was associated with celebration, which is why you would refrain from that when you're doing this special training for this goal.

And then by not touching dead bodies, you were actually adopting these strict rules of ceremonial cleanliness that the priests of Israel followed. So basically, what God is saying for the Nazarite is that Samson was essentially called to live in God's presence, his immediate presence daily, just like the priests did when they were working in the tabernacle, and just like they did later on in the temple.

[15:32] And he was in training towards this special goal. Chapter 13, verse 5, he will begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines.

And as we see in the story, you know, this supernatural power, you know, had nothing to do with his hair, really. You know, it wasn't like those Pantene commercials where it's just like this lustrous, shiny hair, and there was something magical and shiny and beautiful that every woman and maybe man wants.

It had nothing to do with that. The hair was actually just a symbol, a representation of this Nazarite vow. The fact that God had set him apart to serve him for a special purpose.

So we have this identity of Israel, of Samson as a Nazarite. And now when we actually look at Samson's early life, when we actually look at what he did, we really kind of see a contrast.

We follow Samson through these early stages of his life, and it's, wow, couldn't be a different picture. Samson was basically a man who lived by his selfish impulses, right?

[16:47] His desires. And among his many flaws, he had a particular weakness for foreign women. You know, the first, and his own sexual lust.

And, you know, you'll see it in the rest of the passage when you read it tonight. But, you know, the Philistine wife, this first woman that he sees, and he's like, looks good to me.

That's just the first of several women. So after his failed marriage with this Philistine woman, you'll see in chapter 16 that he sleeps with the Philistine prostitute.

And then obviously we all know about, who is that? Exactly. Delilah. Foxy Delilah. And so he really seems to have this weakness.

And I don't really know, actually, what about Philistine women that was so enticing to Samson. I didn't Google, are Philistine women attractive or hotter or whatever.

[17:45] But I don't know. Maybe you guys, some of you guys can relate. I was just thinking maybe a modern analogy. Like, you know, frankly, like all my white friends that come here, from, you know, like British bankers or whatever, they come here and you have like Asian girlfriends or Asian wives.

Maybe it's kind of like that. Maybe. I don't know. You see this Asian girl and it's like, I don't see that at home. This is, I'm just kidding.

It's, I'm just kidding. One of, some of my best friends, obviously Chris Thornton, made an excellent choice.

I was a groomsman for a good friend not too long ago. American guy, white guy, married an Asian girl. And I actually, I love, I think interracial relationships.

Joe and Tracy, I love you guys. I think interracial relationships are a beautiful thing because Christ transcends language and nation and transcends just cultural differences too.

[18 : 53] But actually the, the passage isn't about interracial marriage actually, if you look carefully. It's not. It's not at all. So don't mistake God saying anything about interracial marriage.

If you look at chapter 14, verse 3, Manoah's response to Samson is about the uncircumcised Philistines. And that's really important because it shows that the main issue, the main issue was the fact that they didn't worship God.

These Philistines were uncircumcised because circumcision was the covenant sign between God and his people. So Manoah's concern isn't based on race.

It's actually based on God's explicit command in Exodus 34, that his people are not to marry those who worship other gods. But we come back to Samson, you know, he retorts.

We're still in verse 3. He said, Get her for me, for she looks good to me. And first of all, this, other than the fact that that sounds ridiculous in my mind, this would have been actually massively disrespectful in that society.

[20 : 01] I mean, in terms of not even just talking back to your father, but in such a patriarchal ancient society, that the patriarch, the father's word, was basically law in a sense. And this really just shows Samson's sort of arrogance and his childishness.

And I can just imagine him being this kind of brute caveman. You know, I see, I like, I want. You know? The scary thing, though, is that you can actually also look at this response that he says, and some can also translate it literally as, She is right in my eyes.

Does that sound kind of familiar to you? It's basically what we see as this case for all of Israel by the end of Judges. Every man did what was right in their own eyes.

It's very ominous. It kind of reflects in Samson and what's happening on a broader scale. You know, if it looks good, guys, if it feels good, do it.

I decide what's right for me. That's basically Samson in a nutshell. Continuing the story, afterwards, he probably breaks the two stipulations of the Nazarite rules already, you know, when he handled the lion's carcass.

[21 : 14] And guys, you know something's up there because the narrator's very smart. He puts in, but he didn't, he gave this honey to his parents, but he didn't tell them. Like, you know, I think he's just subtly saying he knew something was off there, but he didn't tell them that he got the honey from the lion's carcass.

And then he threw that wedding feast, if you remember, like all the young men typically do. And you can literally translate that as a drinking party, the word for feast. And so we can be pretty sure that he also was involved with drinking from the vine or wine during that time.

And then Samson, that silly little riddle at his wedding, I mean, I don't know what you were thinking, Samson, but it was his own idea. You know, and then in his own weakness, he gives in to his wife's pressure.

The whole thing quickly escalates into him, you know, in a fit of rage and anger, murdering a whole bunch of Philistines. And then this just escalates from there.

It gets more and more intense. More lives are at stake. You know, his weakness with his first wife that we read about, it foreshadows his relationship with Delilah that I think we're quite familiar with.

[22 : 25] The two incidents are so similar, but with Delilah, after she kind of presses him and seduces him, he actually betrays God completely with Delilah because with her, he reveals the true source of his power, essentially that the Nazarite identity that God gave him.

He sacrifices that. When he let his hair get cut, he was essentially totally giving up his God-given identity. He gave it up for Delilah, for his love for Delilah, and ultimately his idolatry of sex.

And I think that was convicting to me because I was thinking for us, I remember how often do we kind of do this trade-in? How often do I look maybe to the hope of a significant other or if you're married, to your husband and to your wife or whoever, a father, a mother, someone you care about, you look to them to be your functional savior, to be my functional savior, to be the person that only God can be and only God can do?

I think at this point, at this juncture, it's important for us to kind of pause and contemplate because this is ultimately a story not about Samson, not about Delilah.

This is a story about God. So where is he in this? You know, where is God at work in all this? And it's obvious, if you remember, the angel comes, he speaks to Manoah, he speaks to the wife, so if it's not clear already, you know, God initiated something here.

[24 : 04] But just in case that wasn't clear enough, verse 4 in chapter 14 was so, it's actually really important. What does it say? It says, it was of the Lord. It's like God telling me, telling us, it was of the Lord.

It being Samson's pursuit of this Philistine woman. For he was seeking an occasion against the Philistines. Now at that time, the Philistines were ruling over Israel.

And here, I think we see this mystery of how God's sovereign will kind of intersects with our human will and our free will.

Because certainly, God didn't make Samson do something illicitly against God's own commandment. He didn't do that. But God's promise, what was it?

He promised that he would use Samson to begin saving Israel. And in God's amazing mercy, he was even using Samson's own sinfulness and his idolatry for his amazing purposes.

[25 : 05] Likewise, you know, when we see the Holy Spirit coming onto Samson and supernaturally empowering him, I don't think this has anything to do with whether Samson deserves those gifts, actually.

To be kind of simply stating it, the gifts of the Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit, they're functional. They're for achieving purposes. They're for doing something. Whereas the fruit of the Spirit, that's about a person's character.

So I don't think we're seeing God endorsing Samson's choices. I don't think we're seeing God endorsing Samson's character. I think what we're seeing is God faithfully using this final judge, even as Samson is personally and callously disregarding his identity, disregarding his calling.

And even as Israelites are just so apathetic, indifferent, they want to remain under slavery. God is there.

It's not on every line. But the narrator says in verse 4, it's a reminder so clearly that behind the scenes, even when we don't know, when we don't see, when we don't feel he's at work.

[26 : 19] Samson's life is convicting for me, you know, as I was reflecting on this. Because I see my life. I see the culture around me. I see Hong Kong. It's beautiful metropolis.

But it's eerily similar to the time of Samson. That's what I think as I was reflecting on this. You know, remember how I described the Canaanite culture at the beginning?

Well, why don't I just kind of replace it from my own eyes? My culture is about me doing what's right in my own eyes. That's what Hong Kong's telling me. My actions are governed by the goal of getting something in return.

I'm actually willing, if I'm honest, to sacrifice a lot and even hurt the people who are close to me in the name of pursuing something greater. Does that sound familiar to you?

Is that a familiar story? You know, when I think about Samson's life, I also see this idolatry of sex in Hong Kong. You know, it's pervasive.

[27 : 24] It's ubiquitous. It's everywhere. You know, this phrase, sex sells, was obviously coined for a reason. I see it on billboards.

I see it in commercials. I see it on the internet. I see it on websites. I see it in movies. I see it in popular culture. And I think, ultimately, Samson's idolatry of sex, it was much more than literally the act of having sex.

It's actually, I think, much more to do with everything related to romantic and sexual love. You know, the Greeks called this eros. It's where we get the word erotic from. And you may know that, unlike in English, the Greeks actually had multiple words for love, and they called this type of love eros.

And I think what I've experienced in my own life, if I'm honest, is that I definitely think we have a tendency to idolize this kind of love. You know, I enjoy watching movies, and I must say, I'd probably say maybe 99.9% of the movies I watch are, they're pretty solid like bro movies, you know, like, you know, action, adventure, Schwarzenegger, a good drama, a good suspense, maybe some sci-fi for that geek in me, you know.

But then I realized as I was thinking about this that actually maybe the remaining 0.1% is usually inhabited by romantic comedies, and they're usually watched on the plane.

[29 : 02] And so I can say to, you know, my friends, oh yeah, I watched How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days on the plane because, you know, anything you can do in the name of passing time on a flight, you know, that's fine, right?

I'd already watched all the other movies, so I kind of just had to watch all those rom-coms. So even in my own heart, if I'm honest with you, there's something about rom-coms that is appealing, as

manly as I am.

And honestly, if I had more time, I might even indulge in those invitations to watch *The Bachelorette* with some of you who will remain nameless. Maybe if I had an infinite amount of time to spare, I would indulge that.

See, guys, sex and romance is everywhere. Even in my sort of older Chinese uncles and aunties. And just hold on a second.

I'm not going where you think I'm going. See, you hit a certain age. Maybe for guys it's your late 20s or early 30s. And the inescapable question I get asked to dinners and family gatherings.

[30 : 13] You know what it is, right? For you non-Cantonese initiated, it's basically when are you going to start dating or get married?

You know, guys, it's just there. It's expected. We think about it. You know, we like talking about who's hooking up. You know, there's this whole sector of journalism. If you can call it journalism, that's dedicated to celebrity crushes and, you know, who's dating who and who's with who and excellent journalism.

OK Magazine, maybe, or People. I don't know. It's good. And let me be clear. I'm not actually saying any of this is inherently bad. But I think, actually, you've heard this before.

Most of our idols come from things that are inherently good. But we make them more important than God. And that leads us to do very tragic things as a result.

And like Samson, who elevated his love for Delilah above his God-given identity as a Nazarite. And Scripture tells us also that God actually created a romantic love.

[31 : 24] You know, He created sex to be enjoyed in the context of a godly marriage. God is the author of romance. He created it for us, His people. So I'm not saying any of that is bad, actually.

It's a good thing that God made. But here's the thing. Church, when we look at the life of Jesus, you know, when we look at Jesus Christ, God in human form coming to earth, when we look at the New Testament, when we look at the lives of Christ as a single man for all of His life, and we look at people like Paul, we don't see the pursuit of sexual love actually as a calling or a goal of the people of God.

And certainly, we don't see God put any, you know, real value on marriage and singleness as your identity as a Christian. He doesn't. Well, you might say, well, Jeremy, what about Adam and Eve? What about God's command and His calling on them to be fruitful and multiply? And to that, I would say, yes, that's true. But what does Christ say is the true essence, the true measure of fruitfulness and multiplication?

In the kingdom of God, what is it? It's spiritual. It's spiritual birth, spiritual children, spiritual relationships in the family of God, us.

[32 : 53] Matthew chapter 12, verse 46, a powerful passage. While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, His mother and brothers stood outside wanting to speak to Him.

Someone told Him, your mother and brothers are standing outside wanting to speak to you. Jesus replied to Him, who is my mother? Who are my brothers?

Pointing to His disciples, He said, here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and my sister and my mother.

Do you remember the implications of that when you read that for the first time? It's a radical reordering and transformation of this nature of family and relationship in the kingdom of God. Because unlike Israel, the people of God today were not tied to an ethnic group. We don't need procreation to propagate this plan of salvation and to maintain the family of God.

[34 : 03] We are a people whose hearts have been transformed. Our hearts have been circumcised through faith in Jesus Christ. So whether you're married or single now actually does not affect our ability to live out this calling that God has given us.

our calling as a church is to be fruitful and multiply by bringing people into the spiritual family of God, the church.

You can do that biologically and you still need to do it spiritually but you definitely need to do it spiritually. So just kind of think with me for a second here.

What, guys, what if we shifted this paradigm altogether? When we talk about the idolatry of sex and relationships and love, what if we shifted the paradigm in the church instead of our identity being so intimately tied to our relationship statuses?

What if we think about this calling that God has given us and we start asking these questions instead of, you know, it's still an important question, it's valid, but what if the main thing we're asking each other and asking ourselves is this, you know, am I a spiritual parent?

[35 : 18] Who am I a spiritual father or mother to? You know, when we do this, this was really convicting for me because when we do this Father's Day thing or Mother's Day, you know, if you've been with us for any number of time, we usually give out these little gifts kind of as to honor all the adult men or women in the congregation and, you know, whether they have biological children or not.

And I always feel a little kind of tentative. I'm like, should I be getting one? Am I a spiritual father? Am I a father? But I think, honestly, if I had that identity, if that calling was so real to me, I would, and if I saw myself as having the role of a father to the fatherless, a spiritual father because I was investing my time and my energy and I loved those kids around me, I think I would be like, right here, give me one of those water bottles because I'm a spiritual father, right?

But I'm not. And that's always a time for me to kind of dwell on that and think about that. I think if Jesus was here, he wouldn't think twice about receiving one of those because he knew in his heart that his calling was to be a spiritual father to those around him.

You know, what would our community look like if I devoted the majority of my time to the spiritual lives of the people around me? You know, whether you're single or married, how much time do you actually spend bringing in and nurturing a new generation of spiritual children?

You know, is it as much as you would expect a parent would spend parenting and nurturing their own child? single and married people.

[37 : 02] How often do you actually spend time together as an extended church family with the kids and whoever else? Because your identity isn't rooted in your marital status.

We're just an extended family of God and we can walk alongside each other. You have authority from God to speak into each other's lives no matter where you're at in your life journey.

Now, I imagine God's church, it's kind of like the vision that I have. I imagine God's church being a community that is just striving, striving to be a community in which every single person is proud of their singlehood and every married person is proud of their marriage even when things are rocky and not going well.

Why? Because the church is so content, so fulfilled by God's love. And singlehood and marriage are both equally cherished and celebrated.

You know, where we've stopped looking to dating and we've stopped looking to marriage and sex to fulfill the true purpose of the human heart and that's to receive and share the unconditional love that God, our creator, gives us.

[38 : 23] when I think about our mission as a church, man, I think that would be so appealing to a world that is just sex crazed and yearning for happiness, for contentment.

and I think I'm a pretty realistic guy. I know, guys, I know we'll always yearn for something, for things that we don't have.

You know, I do. I catch myself, I catch myself, you know, still in times of discontentment, of loneliness. You know, the grass is greener on the other side.

I need this. The question, some of the questions, like one test that I kind of ask myself is, man, if God kept the status quo in my life right now, no more, no less.

Maybe no more career advancement, you know, no more changes in my social status, in my relationship status. If nothing happened, nothing changed for the rest of my life.

[39 : 28] I keep aging, of course. But would I still be content because I have God? Because I have His love for me? I don't know, to be honest with you.

It hasn't happened to me yet. But I think there's something we can strive for and when I look around me, when I look at this, when I spend time in community with my friends in community group, my brothers and sisters, my family in community, when I see you guys and I experience the family God, I actually start realizing and God reminds me that this, guys, this is actually the most important thing.

What I see God doing in this spiritual family. So I don't know exactly where each one of you are in your spiritual journey. I don't know the idols that you might be wrestling with.

I mean, maybe you guys don't even know yourself. Maybe you're not really sure what's going on in your heart. But I know that God knows. chapter 14, verse 4, that incredible reminder.

God says, he's basically telling us, he's there. He's at work. He loves you. He's pursuing you. While we were still sinners, the Bible says, Christ died for us.

[40 : 49] While we were still unaware and ignorant and blinded by our own idolatry, blind to our spiritual slavery, just like the Israelites where God was at work.

He died for us on that cross. And that cross, that beautiful cross, is the monumental declaration of God's love for us. If you ever are in doubt, just remember the cross because that is just historical, incontrovertible proof in history that God loves you so much that he died for you.

And he's working out his purposes. And guys, if he's doing that while we're far away, like Samson, when we're ignorant like the Israelites, how much more amazing will it be for us when he's actually working out his purposes when we're walking with him, when we're pursuing him, when we're actually worshiping him?

How much more amazing would it be us as a family to be worshiping God and seeing him working out his amazing purposes? And I honestly can't imagine, in my own heart, I can't imagine anything in life that can bring as much genuine joy and contentment as knowing this, that I have everlasting life.

I will have and I do have everlasting life in the presence of a God that loves me unconditionally. I'm going to ask the band to come on back up and let's just take this time in prayer.

[42 : 26] Let's pray for, speak to God, you know, as we fix our eyes on Christ. I believe that hymn is, that old hymn is true. You know, when he says, turn your eyes upon Jesus and lead me to the cross.

And the things of this world really will grow, start to grow dim. The things that entice us, the things that worry us, that burden us, they start becoming dim because it might not be overnight, it might be a lifelong journey and it probably will be, little by little, but those things start to grow dim.

And I just imagine God holding us and me in his hands. It's so secure, so secure than the things that we hold on to so tightly, things that we think we need, that we must have.

We can just start letting go of those things. I don't know what those things are for you exactly, but just take this time to reflect on that and pray. Pray to him, maybe for the first time, God, show me who you are.

Show me the power of the cross and power of Jesus Christ and what he did, how his love poured out for us. lecture more and