

23. Strength



BIBLE STORY / REFERENCE

Judges 13-16

God calls Samson to lead the Israelites to victory over the Philistines



AIMS

To help the children reflect on the mistakes Samson made in using his strength

To help them reflect on their own strengths and to think about how they can use them well

The strengths and skills we have come from God and we should be seeking to see them as gifts from God and to use them in a way that pleases him and benefits others.



PREP FOR LEADERS

Read through the Bible passages for this session. If you are pushed for time, focus on Judges 13:1-5 and Judges 16:4-30. Reflect:

- What are the mistakes Samson makes in the way he uses his strength?
- What are your strengths (gifts, skills or talents) and how can you use them for God?

Take some time to pray for your group.



GAMES / INTRO ACTIVITIES

Choose one of the following activities to introduce today's theme:

▶ Two truths and a lie

You will need: pens, paper (optional)

Get the children to come up with three statements about themselves - two that are true and one that is made-up.

Get them to tell the group the three statements in a random order without saying which is which. See if the group can tell which statements are true and which is false.

If you have a large group, you can divide them into smaller groups to play, or you can choose a few volunteers to share their statements with everyone and let the rest of the children vote on which one is false.

▶ Rock, Paper, Scissors Tournament (Samson version)

You may have used the Rock, Paper, Scissors Tournament activity in the previous session of One Big Story. This is an alternative version introducing the characters from the story for today.

Instead of the hand gestures, teach the children actions for each of the characters in the game:

(continued overleaf)

Samson: strong man pose

Delilah: pose with hands on hips

Lion: raise arms with hands forming claw shapes

Tell the children they are going to compete against one another by choosing one of the three characters and doing its action on the count of three.

Each of the characters wins over one of the others as follows:

- The lion beats Delilah because it attacks her.
- Samson beats the lion because he is super-strong.
- Delilah beats Samson, and we'll find out how later in our story.

After a couple of practice runs get the children to divide into pairs and compete against one another. If both people choose the same character they can play again until they have a winner.

Get the children who were defeated to sit down. Those who are left in the game find a new partner and repeat the process.

Keep on doing this until you have a winner.

▶ Thumb Wars

Get the children to divide into pairs. They have to face their partner, then reach out with the same hand (left or right) and hook the four fingers of their hands together so that they are clasped tightly. Once they are ready, both players should chant the rhyme:

"One, two, three, four, I declare a thumb war."

When they have completed the rhyme, the game begins.

The aim is to hold their opponent's thumb down with

their own for the length of time it takes to say, "One, two, three, four, I have won the thumb war."

You could have the winner from each pair finding a new partner and repeating the game until you finish with one winner.



EXPLORING THE BIBLE

▶ Recap

Remind the children of the story so far. The Israelites got into the land that God promised them, but it hadn't fixed the problem of sin and they kept running into difficulties because they didn't obey God.

During this time, God provided leaders called judges. Last time we heard about Gideon and learned that in a lot of ways he seemed quite weak, but he was able to ask for God's help and know God's power working through him.

Today we're going to think about another judge called Samson who was the opposite – he was known for being really strong.

▶ Introduction to story (skip if short of time)

Can you think of any examples of people who are very strong?

Pierre Gasnier was a French man who was really strong. He worked in a circus in the 1890s and he amazed people with his strength. He could rip a deck of cards in half with his bare hands and lift a weight that was almost twice his own weight!

(You can read about him here: legendarystrength.com/pierre-gasnier)

Samson, the character we're thinking about today was a bit like that. The Bible tells us that once, when a lion attacked him, he killed it with his bare hands!

We're not all physically strong like Samson but all of us have strengths - things that we're good at. It could be maths or singing or writing or sports or being a good friend. How we use those strengths is important, so let's see how Samson used his.

▶ Samson's Story

You will need: printed pictures (see below) or equipment to display pictures on PowerPoint

Tell the children the story, using pictures from **freebibleimages.org**

The numbers from 2 onwards in the script correspond with the slide numbers in the presentation here: freebibleimages.org/illustrations/samson-hair

Instead of slide 1, you could use slide 6 from this link: freebibleimages.org/illustrations/samson-riddle to fill in the beginning of Samson's story.

1. Samson was marked out as someone special even before he was born. An angel appeared to his mother while she was pregnant with him and said that her son was to be dedicated to God. That meant he had never to eat any forbidden food, he had never to drink wine or any alcoholic drink and he had never to cut his hair, so by the time he grew up Samson had very, very long hair.

2. Samson's strength helped him to begin to defeat the Philistines but then something happened - he fell in love with a lady called Delilah.

3. The Philistines went to Delilah and they said to her, "Find out the secret of Samson's strength for us and we'll give you 1100 pieces of silver."

4. So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me the secret of your strength and what it would take to tie you up." Samson said, "If I was tied up with seven new bowstrings that have never been used, I would be as weak as anyone else."

5. So when he was sleeping Delilah got seven new bowstrings and tied him up. Some of the Philistines were hiding in the house and she woke him up shouting, "Samson, the Philistines have come to capture you!" but Samson snapped the bowstrings without any problem.

6. Delilah said to him afterwards, "It's not fair. You're just making fun of me. Please tell me how you can be tied up securely." Samson said, "If you used brand new ropes to tie me up, I wouldn't be able to get free."

7. Once again, she tied him up while he was sleeping, got the Philistines into the house and woke him up shouting, "Samson, the Philistines have come to capture you!" but Samson snapped the ropes as if they were thread.

8. "Samson," Delilah said later. "It's not fair. You're telling lies and making fun of me. Now tell me how I can tie you up." "Well if you weave my hair into the fabric on your loom and tighten the shuttle, then I'd be trapped," he said.

9. So when he fell asleep, she did this, got the Philistines into the house and shouted, "Samson, the Philistines have come to capture you." But Samson woke up and just pulled his hair out without any bother.

10. Now Delilah was really in a bad mood! She said to Samson, "How can you say you love me if you won't share your secrets with me? You've made fun of me three times and you still haven't told me why you're so strong." She went on at him day after day, constantly nagging at him until eventually she wore him down. He got sick of it and he finally said, "I'm strong because I was dedicated to God as a baby and I've never cut my hair. If my hair was cut, my strength would leave me."

11. Delilah realised that this time he was telling the truth, so she called for the Philistines to come back one more time. They came in while Samson was asleep, she got one of them to shave off his hair, and then she shouted "Samson, the Philistines have come to capture you." Samson jumped up, thinking he could get free like before, but his strength had left him.

12. He was captured by the Philistines and they took him away as a prisoner where they made him work grinding grain.

13. A while later, the Philistines were having a festival. They offered sacrifices to their god Dagon and they praised him saying, "Our god has given us victory over Samson."

14. The people asked for Samson to be brought out so they could make fun of him, so he was brought out into their temple.

15. He said to the servant who was with him, "Put my hands against the pillars that hold up the temple. I want to rest them." The temple was filled with 3000 people all laughing at Samson and he prayed to God and said, "Give me my strength back one more time. Let me die with the Philistines."

16. He pushed with all his might against the pillars and the temple came crashing down, killing him and all the Philistines who were there.



REFLECT & RESPOND

▶ Reflection

Talk together:

Do you think Samson used his strength well or not? Why do you think that?

What mistakes do you think he made?

Samson's strength was a gift from God. It was God who made him strong. But although he was physically strong, he had weaknesses too. His strength sometimes made him forget his need to rely on God. Sometimes he used his strength to make fun of people and make himself look good instead of using it to help people and do what God wanted.

Like Gideon, Samson was someone God chose and used as a leader, but neither of them were perfect. The Israelites were still waiting for

the perfect leader – the one who was going to rescue them once and for all. They were waiting for Jesus.

▶ Prayer Activity

You will need: small piece of card for each child, pens or pencils

Give each child a small piece of card. Get them to think about strengths that they have, and to write or draw something to represent them.

It could be subjects they do well in at school, sports or hobbies they are good at, or aspects of their personality – good at listening to others, trustworthy or friendly...

You could give them a chance to discuss this together and point out what they see as strengths in one another.

The Bible tells us that God made each of us unique, with different strengths and skills.

What difference would it make to think about the strengths you have as a gift from God? How might that change your attitude towards them or the way you use them?

Lead the children in prayer, asking God to help them to use their strengths in the right way – a way that honours him and benefits other people.

If an idea of how to use their strengths well comes to mind, encourage them to draw or write that on the other side of the card as a reminder.



ADDITIONAL IDEAS

▶ Bookmark Craft

You will need: strips of cardboard with a hole punched in one end, wool, coloured pens or pencils, scissors

The children could begin this craft when they arrive at the group. Give each of them a bookmark and let them choose some pieces of wool to loop through the hole and to plait to form a tassel representing Samson's hair.

Later on, once they have heard the story, you could either let them use the bookmarks for the prayer activity above, or you could get them to decorate their bookmark with a Bible verse as a reminder that the gifts we have come from God: "Every good and perfect gift is from above." (James 1:17 NIV)