Hunger for God
I believe the Holy Spirit is God at work in my life to give me knowledge through the Bible and through his gifts and indwelling to give me power to live a life of love. 5 Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. 6 The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. (Romans 8:5-6)

Setting Our Sights
Most are familiar with the “frog in the kettle” phenomenon. I have seen frog legs fried in plenty of oil but they were not attached to a live frog. I don’t personally know anyone who has done the frog in the kettle thing and have no idea why anyone would. Supposedly, if one puts a live frog in a kettle of cold water and slowly warms it to a boil, the frog will just stay in the water and swim around until it cooks. The point of the culinary exercise is to illustrate how putting ourselves in compromising situations where the heat is turned up slowly, imperceptibly kills us just as dead as a sudden burst from a blast furnace. Spiritually, it works this way: a little compromise here and a little there and before you know it your love has grown cold (as Jesus warned in Matthew 24:12) to the point that we may, like the Apostle Paul’s former co-worker, Demas, become deserters having “loved this present world.”

How does this happen in the life of a believer who at one time is on fire for Christ? It happens one little step at a time. It isn’t usually the case that a believer suddenly chooses to turn his/her back on Christ. Generally, there is a long path of small decisions and events. This is the theme behind Casting Crown’s song, Slow Fade. The song was written after reading Psalm 1 and noticing that in the first verse there is a progression or regression: “How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!” The writer then goes on:

It’s a slow fade when you give yourself away
It’s a slow fade when black and white have turned to gray
Thoughts invade, choices are made, a price will be paid

Getting Our Bearings
Barry is a committed disciple. He reads his Bible and prays every day. He meets with fellow believers to encourage each other in their walk frequently. He exercises his gifts in service to his church family and to his community. His wife and children are attempting to journey with him toward a deeper walk with Christ. His recent job change requires travel 3 days a week. He is not able to make the meetings he used to make with his group of guys because he is now out of town. He is beginning to find himself turning on the TV to fill the silence and emptiness of his room. This is his question: is there really anything to be concerned about? If so, what should he do about it?
STUDY THE MAP

Judges 16:1-22 (NIV)
1 One day Samson went to Gaza, where he saw a prostitute. He went in to spend the night with her. 2 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. They made no move during the night, saying, “At dawn we’ll kill him.”
3 But Samson lay there only until the middle of the night. Then he got up and took hold of the doors of the city gate, together with the two posts, and tore them loose, bar and all. He lifted them to his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron.
4 Some time later, he fell in love with a woman in the Valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah. 5 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 of silver.”
6 So Delilah said to Samson, “Tell me the secret of your great strength and how you can be tied up and subdued.”
7 Samson answered her, “If anyone ties me with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, I’ll become as weak as any other man.”
8 Then the rulers of the Philistines brought her seven fresh bowstrings that had not been dried, and she tied him with them. 9 With men hidden in the room, she called to him, “Samson, the Philistines are upon you!” But he snapped the bowstrings as easily as a piece of string snaps when it comes close to a flame. So the secret of his strength was not discovered.
10 Then Delilah said to Samson, “You have made a fool of me; you lied to me. Come now, tell me how you can be tied.”
11 He said, “If anyone ties me securely with new ropes that have never been used, I’ll become as weak as any other man.”
12 So Delilah took new ropes and tied him with them. Then, with men hidden in the room, she called to him, “Samson, the Philistines are upon you!” But he snapped the ropes off his arms as if they were threads.
13 Delilah then said to Samson, “All this time you have been making a fool of me and lying to me. Tell me how you can be tied.”
He replied, “If you weave the seven braids of my head into the fabric on the loom and tighten it with the pin, I’ll become as weak as any other man.” So while he was sleeping, Delilah took the seven braids of his head, wove them into the fabric 14 and tightened it with the pin.
Again she called to him, “Samson, the Philistines are upon you!” He awoke from his sleep and pulled up the pin and the loom, with the fabric.
15 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.” 16 With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was sick to death of it.
17 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.”
18 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. 19 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. And his strength left him.
20 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.
21 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. 22 But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.
**Rightly Dividing The Word of Truth**

Number the verbs in Samson’s progression/regression in v. 1

Highlight “fell in love” in v. 4

Highlight “How can you say ‘I love you’ when you won’t confide in me?” in v. 15

Circle “with such nagging” and “day after day” in v. 16

Box “sick to death of it” in v. 16

Highlight “He did not know that the Lord had left him” in v. 20

**Interpretive Questions**

1. Trace the progression/regression of Samson’s fall from going to Gaza to the final step in his fall in this passage.

2. Verse 20 tells us that he didn’t know the Lord had left him. Why do you think a person who had been dedicated to the Lord could get to a point where he didn’t realize he was absent until it was too late?

3. What is the ultimate cause of Samson’s fall?

**WORDCACHING**

**Dig Deeper Into Its Meaning**

**v. 2 they surrounded** “The rest of the verse suggests that ‘the town’ is the object, not ‘the house.’ Though the Gazites knew Samson was in the town, apparently they did not know exactly where he had gone. Otherwise, they could have just gone into or surrounded the house and would not have needed to post guards at the city gate.”[1]

**v. 3 city gate** “Samson decided to leave town at midnight, while the guards were asleep. The fact that the city gates were barred didn’t alarm him. He picked up the doors, posts, and bars and carried them off! Whether he carried them all the way to Hebron, a distance of about forty miles, or only to a hill that faced Hebron, depends on how you translate Judges 16:3. Both interpretations are possible. The city gate was not only a protection for the city, but also the place where the officials met to transact business (Deut. 25:7; Ruth 4:1–2). To ‘possess the gate of his enemies’ was a metaphor meaning ‘to defeat your enemies’ (Gen. 22:17; 24:60).”[2]

**v. 5 rulers of the Philistines** “The five leaders of the five Philistine cities along the coast (see Josh 13:3). The word translated ‘lords’ here (ṣarnēl) reflects a political system unique to the Philistines. The Philistines were originally a seafaring people from the Aegean, part of the ‘Sea Peoples’ known from Egyptian texts.”[3]

**v. 17 any other man** “He had known all along that he was a Nazirite and that the secret of his strength lay in his special relationship with God (his hair was merely a sign of this). But he had never been able fully to come to terms with his separateness. He had always secretly wanted to be as other men and to enjoy the pleasures that they enjoyed (a temptation that is surely common to Christians today). In Delilah he saw a chance, perhaps his last chance, for the happiness he had always wanted. In giving in to her request, Samson virtually invited Delilah to release him from his Naziriteship; to make him the ordinary man he had always wanted to be (17). But, paradoxically, the effect of this was simply to have him forcibly removed from where he wanted to be and placed back into the front line of conflict with the Philistines (20–21).”[4]

**v. 20 he did not know the Lord had left him** The tragedy revealed in these words comes in waves. The fact the Lord has left Samson is a tragedy impossible to calculate. Yet it would never have happened had Samson not first abandoned his commitment to and therefore his relationship with the Lord. It is that fact that makes it possible that one who has been empowered his entire life by the Spirit could be completely unaware when that Sprit was no longer operative in his life.

**Key Thought**

One does not ruin one’s life all at once but one small step at a time. (Or as Casting Crowns suggests, “It’s a slow fade when you give life away. . .when black and white are turned to gray.”)

**Footnotes**


A MEDITATION STUDY OF THE TEXT

Judges 16:1-22 (NCV)

1 One day Samson went to Gaza and saw a prostitute there. He went in to spend the night with her. 2 When the people of Gaza heard, “Samson has come here!” they surrounded the place and waited for him near the city gate all night. They whispered to each other, “When dawn comes, we will kill Samson!”

3 But Samson only stayed with the prostitute until midnight. Then he got up and took hold of the doors and the two posts of the city gate and tore them loose, along with the bar. He put them on his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that faces the city of Hebron.

4 After this, Samson fell in love with a woman named Delilah, who lived in the Valley of Sorek. 5 The Philistine rulers went to Delilah and said, “Find out what makes Samson so strong. Trick him into telling you how we can overpower him and capture him and tie him up. If you do this, each one of us will give you twenty-eight pounds of silver.”

6 So Delilah said to Samson, “Tell me why you are so strong. How can someone tie you up and capture you?”

7 Samson answered, “Someone would have to tie me up with seven new bowstrings that have not been dried. Then I would be as weak as any other man.”

8 The Philistine rulers brought Delilah seven new bowstrings that had not been dried, and she tied Samson with them. 9 Some men were hiding in another room. Delilah said to him, “Samson, the Philistines are here!” But Samson broke the bowstrings like pieces of burned string. So the Philistines did not find out the secret of Samson’s strength.

10 Then Delilah said to Samson, “You made a fool of me. You lied to me. Now tell me how someone can tie you up.”

11 Samson said, “They would have to tie me with new ropes that have not been used before. Then I would become as weak as any other man.”

12 So Delilah took new ropes and tied Samson. Some men were hiding in another room. She called out to him, “Samson, the Philistines are here!” But he broke the ropes as easily as if they were threads.

13 Then Delilah said to Samson, “Again you have made a fool of me. You lied to me. Tell me how someone can tie you up.”

He said, “Using the loom, weave the seven braids of my hair into the cloth, and tighten it with a pin. Then I will be as weak as any other man.”

While Samson slept, Delilah wove the seven braids of his hair into the cloth. 14 Then she fastened it with a pin. Again she said to him, “Samson, the Philistines are here!” Samson woke up and pulled out the pin and the loom with the cloth.

15 Then Delilah said to him, “How can you say, ‘I love you,’ when you don’t even trust me? This is the third time you have made a fool of me. You haven’t told me the secret of your great strength.” 16 She kept bothering Samson about his secret day after day until he felt he was going to die!

17 So he told her everything. He said, “I have never had my hair cut, because I have been set apart to God as a Nazirite since I was born. If someone shaved my head, I would lose my strength and be as weak as any other man.”

18 When Delilah saw that he had told her everything sincerely, she sent a message to the Philistine rulers. She said, “Come back one more time, because he has told me everything.” So the Philistine rulers came back to Delilah and brought the silver with them. 19 Delilah got Samson to sleep, lying in her lap. Then she called in a man to shave off the seven braids of Samson’s hair. In this way she began to make him weak, and his strength left him.

20 Then she said, “Samson, the Philistines are here!”

He woke up and thought, “I’ll leave as I did before and shake myself free.” But he did not know that the Lord had left him.

21 Then the Philistines captured Samson and tore out his eyes. They took him down to Gaza, where they put bronze chains on him and made him grind grain in the prison. 22 But his hair began to grow again.
Inward Journey
Imagine you are Samson’s friend (this takes a lot of imagination as we are not given any indication that he had any friends). As you come to each new turn in the story, imagine the dialog you might have with him in attempting to convince him to consider a better path.

Additional Passages to Reflect on in the Future
Matthew 24:1-14
1 Corinthians 10
James 1:2-15

PLOT A COURSE

Application Questions from The Text
1. The text does not directly condemn Samson’s night with the prostitute. What do you make of that? Are there other examples of behavior that people may try to justify from the silence of particular passages of Scripture?

2. a. Why do you think God would still help Samson in spite of his sin with the prostitute?

Read Romans 6:
1 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 2 By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? 3 Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. 13 Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. 14 For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

2. b. What is different for the Christian compared to Samson?

3. How can we avoid making the kind of mistakes Samson made in his relationship with Delilah?

4. What are the obvious signs we should be aware of when we are no longer walking close to God and what can we do about it?

Personal Reflection/Decision:
Is it possible that the Lord has left you and you did not know it? How could you be made aware? What would you be willing to change to make sure the Lord is back in the center of your life?
Head Out

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the Word, but doers of the Word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

LifeGroup Discussion

1. What would you say your neighbors know about your faith? What has been the outward evidence of it to them? How about your co-workers?

2. Is there anything you can think of in your behavior or in the life of our LifeGroup that would seem to contradict our claim to be disciples of Christ?

Outreach Suggestions

How to Foster Creativity

By Charles Lee • 04/02/2013

Louis Pasteur once said, “Chance favors (only) the prepared mind.” Unfortunately, many have given up on the notion that their minds can formulate creative ideas.

The problem here is not a lack of ability, but rather, the unwillingness to see. Many choose not to see the great ideas that swirl around them in their environment. They lose out because they turn a blind eye to opportunity.

Charles Lee offers four simple ways to discover new creative ideas.

Here are some simple ways to see creative ideas:

1. Take a moment this week to pause and look around you. Do you notice anything remarkable (i.e., worth talking about)? Record your thoughts.

2. Invite yourself into new, unexpected environments to explore how others unlike you think about the world. Seemingly unrelated ideas often spark creativity and innovation.

3. Watch a film or listen to music outside of what you’re used to and note what you liked or disliked about your experience. Record why you feel the way you do.

4. Look at Pinterest boards or Instagram photos on design and creativity. It’s a fun, simple way of visually exploring concepts.

A little shift in the way you see can change everything. Creative ideas are all around. We just have to pay attention.
JOURNEY TOGETHER

This week, we’re discovering:
In this week’s biblical principle, we learn that friends worship God together (Hebrews 10:25; Colossians 3:16). The early believers would meet in each other’s homes to worship God. They would sing praise songs, learn of Jesus’ teachings, and look for ways to help each other.

This habit of the early church was the foundation of Small Groups today. When we meet with our Small Groups, we worship God with our friends. Our Bottom Line is: friends worship with one another. So it is important for us to gather in our small groups on a regular basis.

The monthly memory verse is: “A friend loves at all times. He is there to help when trouble comes.” (Proverbs 17:17, NIrV) We can worship God with our friends at all times, not just at church. Maybe you and your friends can help someone in your neighborhood or start a band that honors God with your songs. Worshiping God is always a great thing to do with your friends.

Parent Cue and GodTime Cards
Each week we provide two additional resources for elementary age children and their families. Parent Cue cards communicate four things to parents: 1) the month’s virtue (or the week’s faith skill); 2) the month’s memory verse; 3) the week’s Bible story; 4) a specific question(s) for parents to ask their child and talk about. GodTime cards contain four short daily devotions for children. Parents, please make sure your child brings them both home each week.

Elementary Brain Bomb Question
Read Hebrews 10:25
What did the writer urge his readers to NOT stop doing?

Preschool PraiseLand (Ages 2 - Kindergarten)

What We Are Learning...
KEY CONCEPT: I can pray to Jesus anytime.
KNOW WHAT: Children heard the story of how the believers prayed morning, noon and night for Peter when he was in jail.
SO WHAT: Children learned that Jesus hears us all the time.
NOW WHAT: Children participated in an activity where they identified time when they can pray.
MEMORY VERSE: “The Lord listens when I pray to him.” Psalm 4:3b NCV

This Week With Your Child...
• Read the story about Peter in jail from a children’s Bible (Acts 12:1-17).
• During the week remind your child at various times of the day that you can pray anytime.
• Pray with your child at various times of the day and thank Jesus that we can pray to Him anytime.
Using The Compass For Daily Devotions

**Monday:** Read “Setting Our Sights” (Pg. 1) and the Text (Pg. 2)

**Tuesday:** “Study the Map” (Pg. 2) and Go “Word-caching” (Pg. 3)

**Wednesday:** Do “A Meditation Study of the Text” (Pg. 4)

**Thursday:** “Plot A Course” (Pg. 5)

**Friday:** “Head Out” (Pg. 6)

**Other Suggestions:**
- Discuss “Getting Our Bearings” (Pg. 1) with your spouse/older children
- Discuss “Head Out” (Pg. 6) with your LifeGroup
- “Journey Together” as a family (Pg. 7)