

Unaccountable Actions

Destructive Decisions Series, May 14 & 15, 2022 | Judges 16:1-6

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How do little mistakes grow into moral failures?

I had a car one time that taught me how easily little mistakes grow into big mistakes.

Years ago, I owned a used Saab. It had a few miles on it, but it was fun to drive.

One day when I was on a trip, the oil light came on. I pulled over and checked the dip stick. There was plenty of oil in the pan, so I decided that it must be a faulty light and kept driving.

On the way home, the car started handling strangely. No matter how much gas I gave it, it felt like I was driving through quicksand. I pulled off the road and called a tow truck.

It turned out that the oil pump had gone out on the car, so no oil was getting into the engine. As a result, the engine blew. I ended up selling the car for parts. That was a sad day.

A little problem like a warning light grew into the giant problem of a blown engine.

Little mistakes in Samson's life grew into big mistakes.

He began by allowing his eyes to wander and become infatuated with a Philistine girl.

Then his mistakes grew into touching corpses and throwing large drinking parties.

He lost control of his temper, ruined his marriage, and left a pile of bodies in his wake.

The mistakes were growing. Would Samson learn?

Samson's big mistakes grew into full-blown moral failure.

Moral failure involves destructive decisions. We do things we are strongly expected not to do or do not do things we are strongly expected to do. Samson did both.

Samson's destructive decisions led to life-altering consequences for himself and everyone around him. He was a true moral failure. We explored some of the reasons in previous weeks.

Little mistakes grow up to become moral failures when we lack accountability for our actions.

We all make little mistakes along the way.

When we are accountable to standards and people, we have the opportunity to learn from those mistakes and to avoid big mistakes, destructive decisions, life-altering consequences, and full-blown moral failure.

When we ignore the voices giving us feedback, we don't change or grow.

That's when our little mistakes naturally grow up to become moral failures.

We're going back to the life of Samson once more today. As we do, we come to the end of his story, and we come away with a compelling picture of the importance of accountability.

Samson's story in Judges 16 revolves around him being unaccountable

Judges 16:1 demonstrates that Samson considered himself unaccountable:

Samson went to Gaza, and there he saw a prostitute, and he went in to her.

Samson lived in ancient Israel in the days before there was a king.

After winning a victory in battle, Samson judged or led Israel for twenty years.

Did Samson learn from the mistakes he made before he became a judge?

Immediately in Judges 16:1 we pick up the story with the statement that Samson went to Gaza.

In this period of history, the Israelites were dominated by the Philistines. Gaza was their largest city. It was also the southernmost Philistine city-state and their capital.

Samson, the leader of Israel, went to the capital of the enemy, far from his homeland.

He was up to no good. He went to a prostitute.

No one would have considered that trip wise, within bounds, or in keeping with advice.

Judges 16:2-3 shows us that Samson must have thought he was untouchable:

The Gazites were told, "Samson has come here." And they surrounded the place and set an ambush for him all night at the gate of the city. They kept quiet all night, saying, "Let us wait till the light of the morning; then we will kill him." But Samson lay till midnight, and at midnight he arose and took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two posts, and pulled them up, bar and all, and put them on his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that is in front of Hebron.

The people Gaza heard that Samson had arrived. They were eager to eliminate him.

They closed the gates on the walled city and waited until morning.

Samson must have been aware of their plans because he got up at midnight.

He went to the city gate and either overpowered or walked right past the guards.

He took hold of the doors along with their supporting posts, ripped them off the city wall.

Samson carried the gates on his shoulders forty miles to the hills of Judah and set them up.

Judges 16:4-6 suggests that Samson increasingly considered himself untouchable:

After this he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, "Seduce him, and see where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to humble him. And we will each give you 1,100 pieces of silver." So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me where your great strength lies, and how you might be bound, that one could subdue you."

Samson became lovers with a Philistine woman named Delilah. The name "Delilah" means night.

Samson is in love with the night.¹

The "lords of the Philistines" came to Delilah and promised her a rich reward for seducing Samson, learning the secret of his great strength, and sharing it with them. She agreed.

Delilah told Samson honestly that she wanted to know how to subdue him. That's no surprise.

What is amazing is that after Delilah made her intentions fairly clear, Samson stayed. Why is Samson still there? Clearly Samson thought he could not be touched.

¹ Daniel Block, *The New American Commentary: Judges, Ruth volume 6* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1999), 453-454

Then four episodes with Delilah confirm that Samson must have considered himself untouchable.

In each of the first three episodes, Samson told Delilah a lie about the source of his strength. In each episode Delilah tried to bind Samson. In each episode Samson escaped Delilah's trap. But in each episode, Samson stayed with Delilah.

The fourth time, Delilah vexed Samson so that he told the truth. He told her that he had kept a Nazirite vow to God since his birth. He told her that if his head were shaved, he would lose his strength. While he slept, Delilah shaved Samson's head, and the Philistines overpowered him.

Samson's response to his hair being cut settles the question. Samson thought he was untouchable.

Samson woke and had to realize that his hair had been cut.

However, he planned to fight and win just like every other time. Clearly, he thought that breaking the last part of his Nazirite vow would have no impact on that strength.

However, his strength was gone. The Philistines overpowered him. They gouged his eyes out, put him in bronze shackles, and sent him to prison in Gaza, grinding grain.

Samson's shock at losing his strength reveals that he thought he was untouchable all along.

None of us is untouchable.

We sometimes think we are above making mistakes.

When we make little mistakes and get away without life-altering consequences, we can expect that we can make bigger mistakes and that those will come without consequences.

So, we resist the accountability of standards and of wise counsel.

However, we are capable of making mistakes, we are capable of destructive decisions, and we are vulnerable to life altering consequences. We are all shockingly vulnerable.

None of us is untouchable. That means we desperately need accountability.

We Are Accountable

Samson refused to think of himself as accountable.

Samson refused to think of himself as accountable to his Nazirite vow. Samson systematically broke that vow and thought that doing so would come without consequences.

Samson refused to think of himself as accountable to God's Law. He broke it flagrantly.

Samson refused to think of himself as accountable to his calling. He never pushed back the Philistines without God's direct pressure.

Samson refused to think of himself as accountable to the expectations that went with his job. The leader of Israel loved the enemies of Israel.

Samson refused to think of himself as accountable to God.

We are accountable to God's objective moral standard.

We don't live by rules we make. We live by rules given to us by God.

The concept of right and wrong isn't something we invent ourselves. Right and wrong is defined for by God; it is objective.

In Exodus chapter 20, God gives us the beginning of our objective moral standard. We call what God said the Ten Commandments. It's one basis of our objective moral standard.

The Ten Commandments begin in **Exodus 20:2** when God says,

"I am the LORD your God ..."

Our moral standard is objective because it is given to us by God and not invented by us.

That's where accountability begins. But we are accountable to more than just an objective moral standard. We are accountable to one another. Why?

We are accountable to one another.

We are family. **Romans 12:5** says,

... so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

The New Testament calls us brothers and sisters.

We are a team; how we each function on that team matters. Whatever one of us does reflects on and affects the rest of us.

In the body of Christ, no one individual is sufficient or complete alone; we need one another. We know that the help we need is in our brothers and sisters. The wisdom we need is in our brothers and sisters as well.

Proverbs repeatedly calls us to pay attention to wise words and to submit to accountability. **Proverbs 3:1-2** says,

My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you.

Let's seek out accountability.

Some people give us advice and counsel without our asking. That's not always the best advice.

We may need to ask people for their wisdom and advice. That's not easy. It implies we are imperfect on our own, and we don't like that. Plus, we are inviting someone to speak about what's right and wrong and guide us. That's not easy.

The next step is even more difficult. We have to listen carefully and value what we receive.

For accountability to really work, we have to submit. We have to be willing to change our behavior as a result.

If we submit to accountability from wise Christians, we are much less likely to find ourselves making destructive decisions that lead to life altering consequences.

We Are Redeemable.

Israel was the real moral failure in the background.

The book of Judges is filled with a cycle: God's people failed, they suffered, they cried out, God sent a deliverer, the people rallied, God threw off the oppressor, the people followed God, there was peace, then the cycle restarted.

Each time this cycle came around, it was worse.

By the time we reach Samson's life, Israel didn't cry out to God for help, Samson wasn't much of a deliverer, and there was no peace.

Israel had become a complete moral failure.

However, Israel was redeemable.

Uninvited and without Israel crying out, God sent Samson to begin delivering Israel.

Even though Samson had no desire to act, God pushed Samson repeatedly to act.

Each one of the big mistakes in Samson's life ended up putting distance between the Israelites and the Philistines, something that desperately needed to happen.

Samson's death was the final blow; there was no going back.

Samson was brought to the Temple of Dagon, the Philistine god, to entertain the Philistines.

As he did, Samson prayed and asked God for strength. God gave Samson supernatural strength one more time, and the Judge of Israel toppled the temple killing everyone inside.

While the Philistines were not decisively defeated, Israel finally began to stand up to the Philistines.

Through later leaders, Israel defeated the Philistines.

God redeemed Israel, and his plan to send Jesus was intact.

No matter how we have failed, we are redeemable in Jesus Christ.

We have all failed. We have all sinned and broken our relationship with God.

However, we know that not all sins and mistakes are the same from a human point of view.

Some sins and some mistakes break trust and damage people to the point that they belong in a separate category. They come with life altering consequences.

We're tempted to conclude that since we have damaged ourselves in the eyes of other people, then we have damaged ourselves in the eyes of heaven in ways that God can never forgive.

That's not true. Jesus died to pay the price for our sin, and no one is unredeemable in his eyes.

No matter what mistakes you have made in life, and no matter what consequences you face here and now, you are precious in God's sight and redeemable.

The question is, will you repent and accept the forgiveness we are offered in Jesus?

Let's repent if we fail morally.

To repent means that we turn away from our sin and turn toward God.

We recognize and appreciate the gravity of our sin. We regret the damage we have done to God, to others, and to ourselves.

Plus, we turn to God. We leave our guilt with God, put our faith in God, count on him for forgiveness, and intend to realign our thoughts and actions so that we obey God.

Repentance opens the doorway to forgiveness and cleansing.

Regular repentance for the sin in our life helps to prevent moral failure in the first place, and repentance is a powerful antidote to the damage moral failure does to us.

The USS New Orleans reminds us that surprising wrecks can be redeemed.

The USS New Orleans was a heavy cruiser in the Pacific during World War 2. After multiple battles, the New Orleans was severely damaged in the battle of Tassafaronga. The bow of the cruiser was blown off. Miraculously and due to the heroic sacrifices of those on board, the cruiser stayed afloat and limped into a nearby harbor where sailors constructed a makeshift bow of coconut tree logs. Then they sailed for emergency repairs nearly 2000 miles to Australia at less than four miles an hour *backward* to prevent the ship from sinking. Finally, they sailed the ship back to Puget Sound Naval Yard for a complete refit. Even a complete wreck can be redeemed. Better still? Less than nine months later, the USS New Orleans was back in action.²

Can we be restored from destructive decisions?

That's the real question, isn't it?

Transparently, it's not easy. When we make destructive decisions that lead to life-altering consequences, the relational damage is usually huge. Trust is broken. Also, typically there are underlying issues that are bigger than we realize at first. Can we be restored from destructive decisions and moral failures? The answer is yes. We can. However, there will be changes.

We need a New Perspective.

God uses morally flawed people. That was the case with Samson. Despite his flaws and his failures, God used him as he promised to begin delivering Israel from the Philistines. God repeatedly uses morally flawed people. Moses was a murderer. King David was an adulterer and murderer. Matthew the Apostle was a Roman collaborator, and the Apostle Paul persecuted Christians. God uses morally flawed people. The fact that God uses morally flawed people leaves us no room for pride. Instead, we have room for humility and gratitude. We need a new perspective.

We need a New Goal.

When we run into life-altering consequences because of our destructive decisions and moral failures, we cannot make our one goal being to get back the life we had before everything changed. God may never put us back in the roles we had before our moral failure. However, God can still use us. God can use us to make and multiply disciples of Jesus where we are. That's the real mission God has given to each and every one of us, and we can be about that work regardless of any other circumstances in our lives. We need making and multiplying disciples to become our new goal.

² <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs/n/new-orleans-ii.html> , [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_New_Orleans_\(CA-32\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_New_Orleans_(CA-32)), <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/w/war-damage-reports/uss-neworleans-ca32-war-damage-reportno38.html>

We need a New Hero.

God was the real hero in Samson's life story.

God was the real hero in Israel's history.

God is the real hero in our story and the real power behind everything we accomplish.

To come back from destructive decisions, life-altering consequences, and moral failures, we need a new hero to star in the story of our lives. May God become the hero for each one of us.