

Self Destruction (35 minutes)

Intro

(I don't remember much of the 80's, maybe you don't either, I was only 6 at the close of the 80's so i don't know why you don't remember the 80's. .) But in the 80's there was an anti-drug commercial about a rat in a cage doing drugs. Sounds like the 80's. And a voiceover says lab rats will take drugs "again, and again, and again... until death". It was a scary commercial about the power of drugs. It was a scary commercial about the power of addiction. And how addiction to drugs will destroy you.

Addiction leads to destruction.

Addictions are actions and behaviors in relation to a certain object or activity that can over time take control of us. Although addictions do not always lead to death like the rat in the cage, addiction always leads down a path of self-destruction, be it your life, your health, your family, your job, etc.

Addiction leads to destruction

Addictions are larger than just drugs though. Drugs and alcohol addiction are the most commonly known as they have outcomes that are hard to hide. Being an alcoholic or drug addict has damaging physical side effects. Yet, there are many other activities that have also been identified as addictive. Gambling is addictive, pornography, sex, video games, shopping, binge eating, plastic surgery, internet surfing, and even work can be addictive. That data is still inconclusive about binge tv watching...(an audible sigh of relief goes out in the crowd in the 01)

What's interesting is that all these activities are not inherently bad. Work is good it's how we make a living but working too much can destroy relationships and perhaps your health. Shopping is fine it's how we get what we need to survive but when you spend all your money and max out your credit cards you put yourself in financial destruction, eating is enjoyable and is important to do every day but binge eating could lead to health issues, playing video games is fun for some people, sex is great... for your marriage and it's how we have kids but it you misuse it it can destroy a current or future relationship. If we misuse these good things they will become addictions.

And addiction leads to destruction.

What leads us to misuse these good things? To become addicts? Well, life is hard, we misuse these good deep down we are broken and hurting inside, things because we are lonely.. And what these activities offer is an opportunity to feel better, these activities offer us an opportunity avoid that feeling of being lonely, to numb our pain from the wounds we carry.

What do you do when life has you down? When you are hurting and broken inside or lonely?

In our series on UnStuck, today we discuss self-destruction. Mike has said throughout this series there is an ideal and Jesus is that ideal. That model that we are striving to be through the power of the Holy Spirit. Yet often times sin and ourselves get in the way. One of the ways we get stuck is Self-Destruction. Self-destruction is often a result of addiction.

Addiction leads to self-destruction.

Most likely within this room someone here is addicted to drugs, or alcohol, sex, gambling, video games, pornography, shopping, eating, internet surfing, work etc.

Before you start to judge the others around I want you look at yourself.

Before you start to feel guilty or ashamed I want you to know there is hope, and there is forgiveness. .

Before you tune out because you are not an addict I want you reflect on how you spend your time.

Addiction leads to self-destruction.

I'd like to share a story from the book of Judges about someone who got stuck. Stuck in addiction that lead to self-destruction. An addict we all know well. Turn to Judges 16 the story of Samson and Delilah.

Let us pray before we read the word of God that we might hear from God.

Text

The book of judges is not the ancient near eastern version of peoples court or judge jury. The Judges were basically generals that would lead the israelites into war during the period after being slaves in egypt and coming into the promised land before the kings of israel like king David.

Judges 16 is a short epic story of the fall of the strongest Judge and perhaps the strongest man of all time. Samson. Samson was a Nazarite, meaning he was to be set apart in how he lived, and he was embodied by God's spirit with supernatural strength.

Judges 16:1 *One day Samson went to Gaza, where he saw a prostitute. He went in to spend the night with her..* This is not how you would want anyone to start a biography on your life, going to a prostitute, but this is the story of Samson.

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.* That is a 37 mile walk. With the city gate on your shoulders. This bro works out.

So why are these three verses here? It's the strangest biography I've ever read. What does it have to do with Samson and Delilah? You cannot understand Samson and his relationship with Delilah without understanding these three verses that precede it.

Here is why I think this story is included: because the author of judges wants you to understand two things - 1st - Samson has a weakness for women, he is visiting a prostitute. You do not accidentally sleep with a prostitute. There is a journey that one takes to sleeping a prostitute. He was already married at this point but that went up in smoke literally, see chapter 15. Samson has a problem.

And secondly, Samson is incredibly strong and smart, he outsmarts the bad guys and leaves before they wake up and he takes the city gate and its support structure miles down the road.

Samson has a weakness for women but he is strong enough and smart enough to get away. This is the context we find ourselves. This is what you need to know about Samson.

For the sake of time I'm going to summarize the story here but I encourage you to read Samson's story in Judges 16 later today or during this week.

Samson falls in love with a woman named Delilah in the valley of Sorek. That's all we know about her and that's all we need to know. She's more or less a minor character. We are not told if she loves him but he loves her. Remember he has a weakness for women. The rulers of the Philistines went to her and ask her to seduce him into showing the secret of his great strength and how they can overpower him so they can tie him up and subdue him. There is a trap being laid here for Samson. The woman he loves is part of the trap. But Samson is stronger and smarter so he'll be fine....

I do want you to look at vs. 6. *Delilah says to Samson, tell me the secret of your great strength and how you can be tied up and subdued.* What? Why does anyone need this information. (This is not something that should be in your google search history, how to tie someone up.)

If you are Samson, you must be thinking why does she need this information? It has to be clear to him it is not for something good. Why would he tell her? Sharing the secret of your strength sure maybe but so that you can be tied up and subdued? Warning, Samson! This is not good!

Remember though from our context we know going into this story Samson has a weakness for women but that he is strong and smart so he always seems to be fine. So Samson decides to tell her and says in vs. 7 that if he is tied with 7 fresh bowstrings that have not been dried he will be as weak as any other man. He has to lie to keep his relationship with Delilah. He knows he's doing something wrong.

And so she ties him up with the undried bowstrings. It doesn't say Samson is asleep. He seems to willingly let her do this. Samson has a weakness for women, but Samson is strong and smart. He'll be fine.

Delilah says the Philistines are coming, the bad guys are coming, and he tears the strings easily it says in vs. 9.

So, Delilah is upset and says you fooled me, you lied to me. Please tell me how you can be tied? Why would anyone answer this question again knowing they had just been tied up exactly as they had said?

Samson lies again and says tie me with new ropes that have never been used. Note how the material is getting stronger. She ties him up. There is still no mention of him being asleep. He seemingly complies and gets tied up again. She says that the Philistines are coming for him and he snaps the ropes as if they were threads. Note the word easy is missing this time in vs. 12. This second go around wasn't as easy to escape. But he's too smart and strong, he has always been able to escape the trouble he gets himself in.

Fool me once shame on you fool me once shame on me. Samson should know better.

Delilah prods him again to share how he can be tied. And he tells her again and lies again to her. This time he gets close to giving away the secret of his strength by mentioning his hair. Now he's really playing with fire. He tells her to weave his hair into a loom and tighten it with a pin. He is almost giving away here what will

destroy him. Its self destruction here. This time while the bible says he was sleeping and his hair was woven into the fabric. He's fallen asleep, he is not even unaware of what is happening. So delilah weaves his hair into the loom with a pin.

Once again Delilah says the Philistines are here and once again he awoke and pulled up the pin and the loom and the fabric. So relying on his strength he is up and ready to fight but note the loom did not break lose. He now has this pin and loom and fabric weighing him down.

You can see with each lie to keep delilah he's giving away more and more of himself. And with each fall to her plan his escape has gotten harder and harder. Samson fits the profile of an addict because he is engaging in risky behavior that the rest of us can see will lead to his destruction. But he won't stop himself. He loves her. And perhaps he can't stop himself.

I feel bad for Samson here. He loved someone that had no love for him. Samson, like all of us desires companionship... to be loved. Perhaps he only thought he could find in the arms of a prostitute or in the arms of Delilah. His desire for this relationship is stronger than his desire to follow God or for his personal safety.

But watch this, Delilah prods him until he was sick to death, as it says in vs. 16. Sick to death! He's not married to this woman. He doesn't have to stay with her. Why would he stay with her? Why would anyone want to be in this relationship, it's not even a marriage and it makes you sick to death! Breakup.

But look, vs. 17 - it says "He told her everything". He told her everything, that his strength would leave him if his hair gets cut. He has now given up everything to keep her. Given up everything to keep this addiction rather than give up on it. Why do addicts give up everything for their addiction? Because they can no longer help it.

And so he falls asleep on her lap, wouldn't he have thought hey, wait a second, she's not going to??? Nah.... I honestly wonder if perhaps he knows but he can't control himself anymore at this point. The addiction is more powerful than him. The strongest man ever has been made weak by addiction. And so she shaves off his hair and his strength leaves him.

But watch what happens here. Honestly what scares me most is vs. 20 *And she said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And he awoke from his sleep and said, "I will go out as at other times and shake myself free." But he did not know that the LORD had left him.* He says I will go out as at other times and shake myself free... Samson thought his strength would pull him out of this. Samson was stuck and didn't even know it. His addiction had him stuck. He didn't realize until it was too late. That's what happens when you misuse good things. You reach a point where you think you can stop, but you can't.

AND so the Philistines come and gouge out his eyes, interesting how it's his eyes, what most likely fed his particular addiction ended up being taken from him, details in the bible are not arbitrary. His addiction took what caused it, his eyes. Ironically he was taken down to Gaza, back to where he had so easily escaped with the enormous gate on his shoulders before. It comes full circle here. And he was bound with bronze shackles and was set grinding grain in prison. Samson's addiction had led to self destruction.

This ladies and gentlemen, in the addict world this is called hitting bottom. It is the place where addiction leads to. It is the place where addicts are finally willing or finally able to admit they have a problem. It's different for everyone based on the addiction. It's different for everyone based on what the addiction caused in their life or in the lives of those around them. It doesn't mean the addiction is over. It just means the addict is possibly going to seek help.

Some might look at this story and say it's all Delilah's fault. It was a fatal attraction. I don't think so. No one could defeat Samson but himself. And so Samson has no one to blame but himself. He had numerous chances to get out of this trap. But he kept the lies and willingly complied until it was too late. Samson hit bottom. He reached a point where he couldn't stop going back to his addiction and giving more of himself to it. He reached a point where he was sick to death and he did not choose to leave and perhaps he could no longer choose to leave, but he gave up everything the Bible says. He gave up everything for his addiction. And His addiction led to his destruction.

Addiction leads to destruction.

Addiction is more complicated than simply just stopping bad behavior. Getting addicted is more complicated than just making bad decisions. To avoid getting stuck you have to understand how God made you and understand things that can be triggers in your life that can be a great cause of temptation for addictive behaviors. (Disclaimer - I am not a doctor, neurologist or a counselor...Here's what I've learned.)

Our bodies were created to enjoy the world that God created. God created our brains to have a neurotransmitter called dopamine that causes intense pleasure in the brain. It is why you feel good when you accomplish a task at work or school. It's why having a good meal feels so good or a drink tastes so good and why sex is so pleasurable. God didn't create a world that was absent of beauty and pleasure, God created a world with taste and smells and color and beauty and that we would experience great pleasure from this world. That's why God doesn't want you to get stuck. He wants you to have life to the full.

Our sin enables us to misuse the world that God Created. Sin has broken everything in the world God created. So life is at times full of sorrow and pain and death. We have broken relationships with our spouses or kids, or parents. We have anger and worry because of school and work. And we have deep wounds from our past that we carry. So addictions happen when we take good things that give us dopamine and misuse them and it destroys us. These addictive behaviors give a quick high, quick access to dopamine, quick access to pleasure to forget the brokenness of our lives and to feel good about life.

We were created to physically enjoy this world but sin has ruined our lives leading us to misuse good things that will physically enjoy us.

If you have never experience addiction in your life just imagine that feeling you get when you are thirsty? Imagine being thirsty for something that will destroy you. That's addiction.

If you have a thirst for something that will destroy you that is addiction. That is why you cannot stop. You are stuck. You have reprogrammed your mind for self-destruction. You are not smart enough and strong enough to escape.

That is why the Bible says that these behaviors will lead to destruction. It is not because God arbitrarily doesn't like these behaviors or the people that do them. God made this world. God made you. God knows what will destroy you.

(It's why I don't let my kids eat all the candy they want.. They'll get sick. It's not good for them.)

Addiction leads to destruction. But destruction is not the end of this addict's story.

Starting in vs. 23 the philistines decide to celebrate their win over Samson. They were so proud of their trophy prisoner they asked for to him to come out and entertain them.

There was a large number of Philistines at this party and Samson's able to put his hands on the pillars of the temple. And then Samson does something he has not done yet throughout this chapter, even when was vexed to death. He prays. Samson prays in vs. 28 "Sovereign Lord, remember me. Please, God, strengthen me just once more and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes"

He reaches the two central pillars and finishing his prayer he asks to die with the Philistines and pushes with all his might. And look at vs. 30 he killed many more when he died than when he lived.

Samson found redemption. He reached his full potential more than any other time in his life. Even though he died with the Philistines. He died as a warrior, a judge, freeing the people of israel. There is hope to move beyond addiction and destruction.

So how did samson go from destruction to redemption? Well there is an allusion to this story in Hebrews 11 where Samson is mentioned by name. Hebrews 11 is the Hall of Faith, you've heard of the Hall of Fame this is the Hall of Faith all the great heroes of the faith find their name mentioned here. But why Samson? What had he done before this? Honestly, a lot of sleeping around and getting into trouble. Yet he is mentioned beside people like Gideon and David and even Samuel! That's an amazing place of honor.

You see this final act was his greatest accomplishment. And the author of Hebrews wants you to know it was made possible because of his faith not his strength. It was his faith in God. Samson's prayer to God was to remember him and strengthen him and Samson had faith that God would

Addiction leads to destruction but Faith in God leads to redemption.

That's why the story of Samson is a story of hope. God can bring someone back from addiction. God can forgive and restore someone. And faith is where it starts. Not faith in yourself and what you can do. You cannot. I cannot. Samson the strongest person of all time could not. But God can.

Hebrews 12:1-2, summarizes what we are to learn from the story of Samson. If you are struggling with addiction and sin because of brokenness and loneliness memorize these verses.

Hebrews 12 says "since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses" people like Samson who know and have experienced the power of faith... "let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles" don't get stuck in addiction, it will destroy you!

"let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Addiction leads to destruction but faith in Jesus Christ leads to redemption. To forgive. Hebrews says Jesus is the perfecter of our faith? And why is he the perfecter of our faith? Why does our faith have power? Because Jesus endured the cross and now sits on the right hand of the throne of God. Have faith in God.

Addiction leads to destruction but Faith in God leads to redemption.

Let me say though that this is not where we say faith alone. That if you just think positive thoughts you'll be fine. It took a lot of time and work to get stuck, to get addicted. And it will take a lot of work and time to get unstuck to no longer be addicted. Faith in God and hard work.

But perhaps even saying "just have faith" to you feels too cliché. Nothing more than a spiritualized pat on the back. So let me be clear, faith is not just staying positive and wishing things get better in your life. Wishing that you won't be addicted. (God is not a wishing well where we toss in pennies). Faith is trusting that God is good and he can deliver you.

When we go do the path of addiction it takes faith but it is misplaced. Rather than put our faith in God we put our faith in another drink or a pill, believing that it will make us feel better not destroy us. Rather than put our faith in God when we are angry or hurting we put our faith in that new piece of clothing or new toy we just bought, that it will make us feel better, and not leads us down a path of destruction. Rather than put our faith in God's eternal love for us we put our faith in that inappropriate relationship that it will keep us from feeling alone.

We have put our faith in our addictions that will prevent us from feeling the pain of our wounds from the brokenness of life. Our actions demonstrate that we have faith in our addictions more than we have faith in God.

Have faith that that you can feel God's love for you when you are lonely, you don't need anything or anyone else. Have that God can heal the wounds of that past, you don't need to self medicate. Have faith that God hears your prayers that he is with you.

I cannot say it enough, Faith is the most powerful tool you have. Samson didn't just stand there being mocked trying to be positive and hoping and wishing that things would get better. Samson was not thinking positive thoughts and wishing he could push on the pillars of the temple. Samson prayed to God and had faith and reached out and pushed on those pillars believing that God had heard his prayer. That God can restore and deliver anyone.

Addiction leads to destruction but Faith leads to redemption.

Implications

So what does Samson teach us about self destruction through addiction:

1. Don't engage in things that will get you stuck -
Take some time today to reflect on what behaviors you find yourself doing most often. Are you misusing something good? Take some time today to reflect on why you do these behaviors. What is the situation when you do this? Are you lonely, do you feel empty, are you broken and hurting? Things with your marriage or your kids or your parents stressing you out or making you angry? Rather than being tempted to misuse what God has intended for good, have faith that by turning to God, turning to his word, and turning to a small group or come into our care ministry.. Don't turn to these behaviors that reprogram your brain to self destruct. Samson had numerous chances to escape, stop before it's too late.
2. Admit you are stuck if you are stuck -
Some of us here today are already stuck. And like Samson perhaps you don't even know it or at least you don't want to admit it. You do not have to self-destruct and hit bottom to get help. Just admit it. Come up here after the service and tell someone. Tell your spouse. Tell someone in your community

group. Tell one of the Pastors here. Samson right before he hit bottom thought to himself, I'll get up as I did before but he couldn't it was too late. Have faith that there is hope to be free from addiction.

3. Don't wait until your friends or family members get stuck-

Perhaps you know someone that is stuck. Or is moving towards being stuck. Or moving towards self-destruction. Part of the community in the body of Christ is being willing to love others enough to keep them from hurting themselves. At the end of this story you see that Samson's family comes for the body. Don't wait for them to hit bottom. We can help those that are stuck. Pray. Be bold. Be loving. Encourage them. Be there for them. They're stuck. Often times from the brokenness they are experiencing in their life. Have faith that God can change their life .

Conclusion

There was another study that happened around the same time we were told that the rat in the cage will take the drugs again and again and again until it dies. This study did not isolate the rat in a cage but put the rat in an area with other rats. These rats together also had access to the drugs but studies showed these rats were less likely to misuse the drugs. The controversial hypothesis was that only a rat alone in a cage takes drugs. The rat in a community is less likely to.

Is it possible that the defense we have against getting stuck in behaviors that lead to addiction and self destruction is to be in a community. To have a relationship with God and have relationships with other Christians?

I believe that often times we create our own cage. We isolate ourselves from God because deep down we believe the lie that God is not enough. That we we need something more. And so we create our own cage and we are stuck. We live in cages with our anger. We live in cages with our pain, feeling all alone. And so we feel that we need to gamble to feel better, that we need another drink to feel better, that drugs, pornography, sex, video games, food to buy more stuff to make us feel better.

But we don't just isolate ourselves from God in a cage we isolate ourselves from others believing that having relationships will only lead to more pain. And We isolate ourselves from others because of the shame and guilt we carry from the things we've done because of our addiction. We create our own cage. We buy into the lie that no one else struggles and so we struggle alone in our cage. Just hoping we we avoid self-destruction.

But the good news of the gospel is that God has come to set us free. Jesus came to set us free. That we might not be stuck but that we would have life to the full. To free us from our cage. To be with us when we are alone. To be with us when we are in pain. To love us when we feel unloved. To be strong when we are weak. We don't have to be alone in a cage. He's given us a community of believers in the church. Not to judge each other but to love each other. To strengthen each other. To pray with each other. So that we might never be stuck in a cage of addiction and self destruction. But to be living life to the fullest by believing in his Son Jesus Christ.

Addiction Leads to destruction but faith in God leads to redemption.