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The Greatest Commandment

Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:1-25

Theme: Love the Lord your God with all your heart

Jr High (Ages 12-14)

Free curriculum for small and rural churches

Lesson Overview

"Samson's Wild Story: God's Strength in Our Weaknesses" Imagine a guy who looked like a superhero, tall, strong, and full of fire, but his greatest battles weren't against enemies... it was with his own flaws. Samson's life in Judges shows us that God doesn't call us to be perfect, He calls us to use the gifts He gives, even when they're messy or misunderstood. Like Samson's hair (a sign of his strength), God gives us talents, passions, and even our weaknesses, so we can serve Him, not ourselves. The question isn't can we succeed, but will we let God use what we have, even when it feels uncool or unfair? Life Application: What's one "weird" gift God gave you? How can you serve Him in it this week? (Encouragement for teachers: Keep it real, ask students to share what they see in Samson's story that's hard to take!)

Bible Story

Sunday School Lesson: Samson , God's Strength in Weakness (Judges 13, 16)

The story of Samson begins with a family in trouble, his parents, Manoah and his wife, had prayed for a son for many years, but God had chosen not to answer in the way they expected. (Judges 13:2). They didn't understand why a child who would later be called "the Nazirite" wasn't born as they'd hoped. But God was working in a way neither of them could see. His plans were bigger than their prayers. When a new angel appeared to Manoah's wife, she whispered to him, "He said to me, 'You will conceive and bear a son... and he must not drink wine or beer or eat anything unclean...' (v. 5). Though the angel vanished, the message stayed: God had a purpose for this child, and it wouldn't be easy.

Samson grew up, but he didn't know how strong he'd become. The Bible doesn't tell us much about his childhood, just that he was a boy of promise. His parents probably wondered how they'd raise him, but they trusted God's instruction to keep him separate from the world (Judges 13:4, 7). Then, one day, he met Delilah, a woman who wasn't kind to

him. She promised him wealth if he'd reveal the secret of his incredible strength. Samson, who'd never let weakness define him, was tempted. He knew the truth: His power came from God, not from food, drink, or even his hair, all things he'd sworn to avoid since birth (v. 7). But pride and fear made him let down his guard. When he finally told Delilah the real secret, that God had given him his strength, she used it to trick him into betraying his people. He was captured, and though he begged for mercy, his enemies killed him anyway.

The story ends with Samson's death, but it's not the end of his story. God's work never is. His strength wasn't just physical, it was his unshakable faith. Even when he failed, he never stopped trusting God. Samson's life teaches us that our power isn't about what we can do, but about who we trust. We might feel weak in the eyes of the world, broken, scared, or tempted to give in, but God's strength is always enough. His promises are true, even when our plans fail. And like Samson, we can choose to live with integrity, knowing that God is faithful, no matter what happens.

Why This Story Matters: Samson's life reminds us that God's strength isn't about being invincible, it's about trusting Him when we're weak. The world often pushes us to prove ourselves or chase power, but Jesus said, "Without me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Even in our weaknesses, we can be strong because God sees us. This lesson is a call to ask: Where am I letting pride or fear control me? God's strength isn't just for heroes, it's for you.

Key Verse

Deuteronomy 6:5

Here's a heartfelt and simple explanation for junior high students: Samson was the strongest man in Israel, but he lost everything because he didn't trust God, he let his pride and anger take over. In his final battle, he realized he was running out of time and begged God for one last chance to prove he could be strong again. His prayer wasn't about getting revenge or fixing his mistakes, it was about asking God to help him one more time because he knew he was too weak on his own. Real question: What would YOU ask God for if you were in Samson's shoes? (Maybe strength for a tough day, wisdom to fix a mistake, or courage to stand up for what's right?) Life application: Samson's prayer reminds us that even when we feel broken or tired, God doesn't want us to quit, He wants us to ask. Whether you're struggling with pride, fear, or pride in your own strength, God hears you. Like Samson, ask Him to help you one more time when you're at your lowest. He might just use that moment to show you how much He loves you, and how strong He is when you trust Him. Would you like me to connect this to a specific situation they might face (like friendships, school stress, or faith doubts)?

Activities

Activity 1:

1. Set the Scene (2 min):
2. "Samson's strength came from God's Spirit, but he messed up big-time, like cutting his hair (Judges 16:6). How does that make you feel?" Write student reactions on the board. Ask: "What's a 'weakness' you've struggled with? How can God use it?"
3. Cut & Glue (5 min):
4. Hand out construction paper. Ask: "What does Samson's haircut symbolize? What about his enemies' betrayal?"
5. Cut out and glue:
6. Left side (Weaknesses): Images of Samson's haircut, Philistine traps, blind Delilah's lies.
7. Right side (God's Strength): Bible verses (e.g., Judges 16:28, "The Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon him"). Print images of Samson swinging the jawbone or crushing Goliath-like scenes.
8. "Now, how does Samson's story show God works in 'weakness'?"
9. Reflect & Share (3 min):
10. Have students turn to a partner: "What's one thing Samson's story teaches us about trusting God in hard times?" Walk around to listen, then call on 2, 3 to share aloud.

11. LIFE APPLICATION TIE-IN:

12. "Samson's strength wasn't his hair, it was God's power through him. How can we trust God in our 'weaknesses' today?" (Example: fear, pride, or doubt.)

Activity 2:

1. Introduce the Debate (3 min):

2. "Samson's life is wild, strength, betrayal, God's miracles. Today, we'll argue: Was Samson a real hero? Why or why not?" Write "Pro-Con" on the board.

3. Split students into 2 teams (or pairs). Give each team an index card to write 3 points for or against Samson's heroism.

4. Time the Debate (5, 7 min):

5. Team A (Pro): "Samson's strength came from God. Even when he failed, God used him to win battles." (Focus on Judges 13:24, 25, 16:28.)

6. Team B (Con): "Samson was reckless. His pride and trust in Delilah led to his downfall." (Reference Judges 16:6, 20.)

7. Set a 3-minute timer per side. Have students argue in 1-minute bursts, then switch teams.

8. Class Discussion (3 min):

9. Ask: "Which side makes you think more about Samson's story?" Bring it back to God: "God used Samson's life to show His power through weakness. How can that change how we see our 'failures'?"

10. LIFE APPLICATION TIE-IN:

11. "Samson's story isn't just about strength, it's about God's grace. When we mess up, God doesn't discard us; He uses us. Who's someone in the Bible (or real life) who 'failed' but God used?" (Example: David, Peter.)

12. Why These Work for Junior High:

Discussion Questions

• Here are four open-ended discussion questions designed to spark meaningful reflection on Samson's story while encouraging students to apply its lessons to their own lives:

• 1. "God's Strength in Our Weakness"

• Samson's greatest strengths, his superhuman strength, his charisma, and his boldness, were also his biggest weaknesses. Think about a time when you felt strong or confident in something... only to realize later that your strength was also your downfall. What did you learn from that moment? How can you trust God to give you strength when you're weak, like Samson did in his final moments?

• (This question invites students to examine their own struggles and the tension between human pride and divine trust.)

• 2. "Love and Loyalty: What Would Samson Have Given Up?"

• Samson's love for Delilah wasn't just romantic, it was a test of his commitment to God. He knew his strength came from Him, but he let pride and fear guide his choices. If you had to choose something, even something powerful or tempting, what would you not give up? Why? How does Samson's story challenge you to ask: Am I putting my trust in people, status, or desires instead of God?

• (This connects Samson's story to modern temptations like social media, peer pressure, or materialism.)

• 3. "Oops, I Did That Again!"

• Samson made so many mistakes, blindly trusting enemies, failing to pray, and letting his hair grow out (a symbol of his God-given strength). When have you done something you later regretted? How did you respond? Samson's story shows that God doesn't always punish us for our failures but often uses them to teach us. What's one lesson you've learned from your own "Samson moments"?

- (Encourages students to reflect on accountability and growth.)
- 4. "The Last Stand: When Was Samson's Greatest Victory?"
- Most people know Samson's story as a tale of tragedy, but what if we saw it differently? In his final moments (Judges 16:29-30), Samson cried out to God when it mattered most. His strength didn't fail, it was redirected by his faith. If you had to pick a moment in your life where you stood strong despite your weaknesses, what happened? How did God use that time for His purpose?
- (Focusing on perseverance and God's faithfulness beyond the "big" moments.)
- Why These Work:
- Open-ended = Encourages personal stories, not just biblical facts.
- Relatable = Connects Samson's flaws to modern struggles (social media, peer pressure, etc.).
- Life-applied = Helps students see how their own choices matter to God.
- Would you like any of these adjusted to focus more on teamwork, prayer, or another theme?

Prayer Focus

Prayer Focus for Junior High Students: "When God Shows Up in the Weakest Moments" Teacher: "Alright class, let's take a breath and ask God together right now, something that might look messy, or even silly to us, but that's where His power really shows up. Think about this: Samson's life was all about 'oh no, I'm so weak!', but God used him anyway. So today, we're asking Him to help us trust Him when we feel small, when the world says we can't, and when we mess up. Not because we're perfect, but because we're His. Let's pray together." Prayer: "Lord, we come to You when we feel weak, when our hands shake, our words stumble, or our plans go sideways. You know how Samson did everything wrong (like eating raw grapes or falling for Delilah), but You still used him because You saw something in him no one else did. Help us today to trust You even when we fail, even when people doubt us, or even when we don't feel strong enough. Give us the same courage to stand up, to speak up, and to believe in You, even when it's hard. Teach us that Your strength isn't about being perfect; it's about being Yours. Amen." Life Application: "This prayer isn't just about Samson's story, it's a reminder that God doesn't need us to be superheroes; He needs us to try. Like Samson, we'll mess up, and that's okay. But if we trust Him, even in the mess, He'll use us to do something amazing." Why it works: - Honest language ("messy," "silly," "we fail") makes it relatable. - Real questions ("when we feel small?") mirror what 12-14-year-olds face daily. - Link to Samson's story shows how God works in imperfect people, just like us. - Ends with action ("trust Him even when it's hard") ties to the lesson's theme.

>> Missions Spotlight

Among the Xhosa people of South Africa, the concept of physical strength and warrior culture is deeply valued. Samson's story resonates, and the contrast between Samson's selfish strength and Jesus' sacrificial strength opens powerful Gospel conversations.

-> To the Cross

Samson was given great strength but misused it for selfish purposes. Jesus was given all power in heaven and earth, and used it to serve, sacrifice, and save. Samson's life shows what happens when we use God's gifts for ourselves. Jesus shows what happens when we use them for others.