

Community Group Guide

new hair

The Gathering

Paul Jenkins

January 29, 2012

Judges 13-16

Community Groups are the primary vehicle for discipleship at The Gathering. It is through the interaction that takes place in each of these groups around our area that will enable people to begin to move from being drawn to God to a life that is being deepened by God. Use it as a resource to lead your group in discovering, owning, and applying the truths of God's Word. There may be aspects you do not want to use and there may be instances where you just want to focus on a particular point or truth. Some questions may bring out emotions and cause people to dwell on an aspect of their relationship with God. Your role is to help facilitate this encounter with God in His Word through His Body, not just to complete the guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool not a rigid group task list.

HEY!

Begin your group time by engaging in relational conversations and prayer that may include the following elements:

Greet each other—a simple, brief time to greet one another (especially new friends), enjoy refreshments, and make announcements.

Week in review—a time to review the truths discussed last week and report on how members have had success or frustrations in applying those truths during the week. The leader will want to provide encouragement and shepherding during this time. Periodically, the leader will also want to review the gospel and allow members to share reports about opportunities they've had to share the gospel. Occasionally, the leader will want to revisit the vision for the group and discuss ways to accomplish that vision better.

Opening prayer—a time of general prayer with the whole group praying for struggles regarding the application of truths, for those with whom the group is sharing the gospel, and for understanding of today's truths.

SAY!

Use the following summary and questions to review this week's message and reflect on its implications in our lives:

Message Summary

Pastor Paul wrapped up our January series - "new" - with a look at one of the most famous judges in Israel's history. Samson was a man who was set apart by God and destined to do amazing, unique works for God's kingdom, and the most memorable sign of that calling was his hair. The unparalleled account of this man's up and downs can be seen in the good, the bad, and the glory.

1. **The Good.** Samson was the fulfillment of a promise made to an unnamed woman who was held captive by the Philistines along with the rest of her country. He was born to be the deliverer of Israel, and the outward sign of this calling was his hair, which according to his Nazarite vows, was to never be cut.
2. **The Bad.** As it turns out, there's a lot of bad in the story of Samson. He was a bad Nazarite, breaking 2 of the 3 "no's" of his vow, and he was a bad deliverer. Like a bad superhero, Samson used his power to serve his needs. He had a terrible history with women, was often motivated by personal loss and revenge, and eventually lost his hair, which symbolized the loss of God's presence and power in his life (Judges 16:20). He threw away his calling and found himself blind and in prison.
3. **The Glory.** After all the ways that Samson had toyed with the calling on his life, God could have left him in prison, blind and bald. But He didn't! Judges 16:22 is one of the most grace-filled verses in the Bible, and it simply says that his hair began to grow again. That simple statement means that

Community Group Guide

new hair

The Gathering

Paul Jenkins

January 29, 2012

Judges 13-16

God is in the hair restoration business, and He gracefully restored Samson to the place where he could once again fulfill his destiny. The reality, though, is that he was still blind and still in prison. In fact, he died that way, but he died bringing more glory to God in his last days than in his first ones. We may struggle with the reality that even though God restored Samson's hair (his calling and strength), He didn't restore his sight or his freedom, but Samson's life illustrates the truth of Galatians 6:7, which tells us that God can't be mocked and that we all reap what we sow. The good news in all this is that no matter how much we've done to throw away our destiny, God is always seeking to restore us to a place where our lives can bring Him much glory. The key is to stop asking God to make our lives better, and start asking Him to make our lives count.

Discuss

Use the following questions to review and apply the points learned in the message.

- Which part(s) of Samson's life do you relate to the most?
- Samson was set apart for God even before he was born, but he obviously didn't live set apart. Discuss the difference between being set apart (1 Peter 2:9) and living set apart (2 Corinthians 6:17-18; John 17:15-16). Why does it matter?
- All of us can struggle with "keeping vows" when it comes to our faith, and often it can make us feel like we're simply living with a list of dos and don'ts. How can we live differently without simply living religiously?
- Pastor Paul mentioned fairy tale endings in the message, and how Samson's life doesn't have the fairy tale ending we all hope for. Discuss how Samson's story challenges our American thinking that the Gospel should always work out well for us.
- How does Romans 8:28 fit into Samson's story? Who defines what is "good" for us? Does the fact that God is working for the good of those who love Him mean that He always does good things for us?
- One of the last statements Pastor Paul made was: "It's time to stop asking God to make your life better, and start asking Him to make your life count." How can this statement bring everything in our lives into more focus on a Kingdom agenda?

PRAY!

Encourage your group to break out into smaller, same-gender groups where they will respond to the truths of the message. These groups will share with one another based on the following questions and then close in prayer:

- What are some of the main truths that God wants you to know from the message?
- According to the truths from the message, what does God want you to desire/value?
- How do your desires/values need to change to align with His desires/values?
- What actions does God want you to take according to the truths of this message?
- What is an action that you can start to implement today or tomorrow?

Close this time by praying for each other, specifically for strength in the application of these truths and for the lost people with whom you are seeking to share the gospel.