

Redemptive Recovery from Ethical Failure. Carver

Thanks be to God for all of you in your respective areas where God has called you as a moral and ethical and spiritual leader.

I pray that the Lord uses our time here in these few minutes to remind us of the importance of every moment that we live our lives. I'm thinking of the psalmist. Right now I'm going through the Psalms in Psalm 90.

where God says, you know, if you're able to live long enough, 70 years is about all that you're going to get, maybe 80, which is icing on the cake, anything over 70.

And the Psalmist goes on to say, well, Lord, Teach me to number my days that I may gain a heart of wisdom. And that's sort of what this is all about. I accepted Jesus Christ.

as my Savior and Lord when I was 11 years old. I'm a seventh-generation Christian, so I don't really have any excuse for not...

walking the talk. I was raised in a religious family that kept me in church.

Age of 14, I felt a call on my life to be a pastor, a minister.

and even more specifically, a military chaplain after an Air Force chaplain came to speak at our church.

And I just there was something about the marriage of a pastor and a pastor in uniform that I saw in that chaplain that sowed a seed in.

in my soul that came to fruition several decades later. After college, I had a ROTC, a commitment with the military for about six years.

and was really enjoying the military environment family. Oh, let me back up for a second. Very important.

I'm married. My wife and I in two weeks will celebrate 51 years of marriage. We have two adult daughters and five grandchildren. I led my wife.

uh to Jesus Christ the savior Lord when she was a 17 year old and shortly before we were married So that's very, very important as far as my my journey.

I reminded her that I was either going to be a military officer and make that a career or a minister so she gets both.

About six years into the military experience, I had an individual ask me, what are you going to do with the rest of your life? And I had it all laid out. I'm going to do maybe 20, maybe 30 years in the military, retire, go to seminary.

and then pick up that call that God gave me when I was 14 years old. And the deacon said to me, don't give God the leftovers.

And it was he sort of it was humorous, but it was one of those things that the Holy Spirit pricked my conscience.

And sort of like, hey, who's running the show? You and your plans? Because God says, I know the plans I have for you.

plans that are good and not evil, plans for a future and a hope. And I surrendered my plans to the Lord and shortly after that resigned my commission I went to seminary. I was a civilian pastor for a while and came back in as a military chaplain in 1984.

and then for the next 30 years as a military chaplain. So that's my story.

I think we should probably go on into what Cal has asked me to do. I presented this material that you have several years ago now.

You're going to have the notes, but it has to do, we were discussing ethical leadership issues at the time. And for some reason, God led me to the life of Samson's kind of kind of humorous. Two weeks ago, my youth pastor at my church spoke on Samson. And as I sat there quietly, He basically said that Samson was one of the most successful leaders that you'll find in the pages of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. And it is true.

that he is mentioned in the Hall of Heroes. He is mentioned as a man of faith in Hebrews chapter 11. In fact, the scripture says, what more shall I say? Time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak, and there's Samson's name right there.

I did not speak to the youth minister about this, but I was reflecting on even this, our discussion today regarding Sampson.

Maybe we can conclude in these few moments whether or not he indeed passed or failed.

as an ethical leader. We will have to all agree in faith that he did at least leave this earth and go into eternity as a man who believed in God, That faith that he had in God, I believe God credited that to him as righteousness. But how great of a leader could he have been And how many people could he have affected beyond his capacity as a judge of Israel if he had finished strong? There's a poem that I have included in the handouts. I won't go through all of it. It's a very interesting poem.

that was penned by Rudyard Kipling in 1909. He actually wrote this poem and dedicated it to his son who was about to approach manhood. So maybe I'll just read it very quickly. We don't hear poetry often, so if you'll bear with me and the and the poem is there. If you can keep your head

when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you, You can trust yourself when all men doubt you, but make allowance for their doubting too.

You can wait and not be tired by waiting or being lied about. Don't deal in lies or being hated, but you don't give way to hate it.

and yet you don't look too good nor talk too wise. If you can dream and not make dreams your master, If you can think and not make thoughts your aim, if you can meet with triumph and disaster and treat these two imposters just the same, You can barely hear the truth you've spoken twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools or watch the things you gave your life to broken and stoop and build them up and worn out tools.

You can make a heap of all of your winnings and risk it on one turn of pitch and toss and lose and start again at your beginning and never breathe a word about your loss.

If you can force your heart and nerve and send you to serve your turn long after they're gone, and so hold on when there's nothing in you except the will which says to them, hold on.

You can talk with crowds and keep your virtue or walk with kings and not lose the common touch. Neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you.

If all men count with you, but none too much, You can fill the unforgiving minute with 60 seconds worth of distance run. Yours is the earth and everything that's in it, which is more.

You'll be a man, my son.

As I said, Richard Kipling, Poet Laureate of England, wrote this in 1909 for his teenage son about the importance of maintaining your personal ethics and the reason I begin with that There is a West Point officer class of 2000 Rhodes Scholar.

who referred to this poem in his book, The Unforgiving Minute, A Soldier's Education, Captain Craig Mullaney.

And he said in the book that he often wondered with all of his military education and all of the mentoring and the preparation to be a commissioned officer, he wondered.

how he would answer that one unforgiving minute on the battlefield, which many of you who have been to war, there's that the carnage and the chaos that takes place. And he was waiting for some soldier to say, what do we do now, sir? And he hoped, that his education at West Point, his ethical standards and his beliefs would be sufficient to answer that critical moment on the battlefield.

Those unforgiving minutes when you have to make a quick, sudden decision wisely and you can't take it back.

And in 2003, he came face to face with those unforgiving minutes when his platoon was caught in ambush while in combat in Afghanistan. One soldier died.

and many of his troops were injured. He knew going into the fight that there would be casualties, yet he tried his best to prepare his soldiers for war as much as possible so his the thing that that haunted him or challenged him was that moral conscience of being a good manager of the minutes, these unforgiving minutes that God, by His grace, gives to us. And are we a good steward? of the minutes given to us. I've just finished preaching a series of lessons on the book of Malachi. And many of you know one of the scriptures. In fact, prior to preaching this book, the only verse I usually quoted from Malachi was bring you all the tithes into the storehouse.

Always a good stewardship sermon. But as I studied that whole concept of stewardship, God was asking not for just 10% of your earthly goods but the really context is give God what is worth his due as a holy god and so if you would allow me to just suggest to all of us today that these minutes That you and I have with a clock. This Kronos time. May God convict us through his Holy Spirit.

to be good managers of these minutes. When I prepared this for Cal and the ACTS conference several years ago, I looked at a number of issues and we can go to the next slide of some officers those who in the armed services had failed at some of those unforgiving moments that come to us when you have to make an ethical decision to move forward and and and do the right thing to if you will maintain the high ground when when there's so much temptation and you can just be here. And this was three or four years ago. I, if I were to pick up an army times, uh, or even the early bird, which is a paper that we look at all the latest military news.

Most of this doesn't surprise us with those who get engaged in those who get engaged in unethical conduct those those who embarrass themselves and their families It's just quite sad.

Those who are toxic leaders, those who bully their staff, that one unethical decision that's made that just destroys their credibility.

and their lives. So, in the book of Judges, we read the story of Samson.

it was it was a very interesting book in the sense that Four chapters are spent on his life and all of the things that were going for him as he was birthed.

If you look at his history, he was a judge, but he was I would say he was a failure as an ethical leader. He lived a reckless life.

He allowed his emotions, his passions, his pride, his anger to direct his life for 20 years, and yet he was Israel's judge.

The mission of the judges at that time was to serve the people of God and keep them on track.

But the scripture says most of those judges that were his peers did evil in the sight of God. And Samson began with so much.

His mother, who had been barren for years, an angel of the Lord visited her and told her that she was going to have a child, and this child had a promised destiny. And the angel came several times to make sure she knew that this child, God's hand was on his life.

The angel of the Lord told him to dedicate Samson to the Lord and to take the Nazarite vow, no wine, no strong drink.

Don't involve yourself with eating or drinking unclean food or drink. His name, Samson, by the way, means...

a sunshine, a little sunshine, a little sunshine, not the sun of righteousness like Jesus, but he was anointed by the Lord.

He had superhuman strength. He had God's anointing. The Scripture says he killed a lion with his bare hands and tore it apart like a young goat.

He took the jawbone of a donkey and killed a thousand men. Can you imagine? He caught 300 foxes and set their tails on fire and lifted up iron gates off the city of Gaza.

His parents were loving, God-fearing people. He had the privilege of an anointing by God. But it spiraled out of control.

One lesson I would just remind you of is that the greatest commitment, spiritual commitment of parents and sometimes is even greater than their kids' ethical standards.

I would just challenge all of us, regardless if you do have children, that we continue to pray that the Lord teaches us to raise up our children in the fear and the reverence of God.

As we do that, the scripture promises, God promises that they will not go too far from that path. But we should not feel guilty if our kids are not sitting in the choir and doing great things for God, taking the great commission to the ends of the earth, they still have their will.

And so what was Samson's issue? He took his eyes off God.

In the book of Judges, there is a scripture, chapter 17, which basically says, in those days, there was no king in Israel, and everyone did what they saw was right in their own eyes.

and that was Samson's problem. His attitude was what's in it For me, in chapter 14, verses 1 through 3, he saw a beautiful woman. And what did he tell his parents? Hey, get her for me because she's right in my eyes.

It wasn't an issue if it was right in God's eyes. He didn't really care. His parents argued with him. They They said they'd go with him and find someone else, but no, he wanted something that was right in his own eyes.

In fact, when we as ethical leaders want to pursue and to live our lives by what we think right is on our eyes, we can fall into with the culture that's around us because that's exactly the way our culture is in the 21st century. We do not want to rely on the authority of almighty and sovereign God who guides us into the truth. In fact, he is the way, the truth, and the life. But we can find ourselves, even as Christian leaders, being tempted by the culture around us, doing what's right in our own eyes. And there's a spiral that happened in Samson's life.

you can see the spiral of failure. When he took his eyes off of God, focused on his own agenda, he became impulsive.

He was driven by lust, his stomach, if you will, and his own emotional anger and passions.

He began to compromise.

In chapter 14, verse 10, after the marriage to a Philistine woman, Timnah, had a wedding feast and he had a bachelor party of all bachelor parties.

with wine and strong drink. The scripture says, like the other young men. He was unteachable.

No one could persuade him. He was a loner, a reminder to us as we make our ethical decisions We certainly need accountability partners or those who can speak truth to us as we're making decisions. He was full of pride.

He often exploded in anger. Heterosexual addiction, chapter 16, verse 1. He went to Gaza and slept with a prostitute.

And he loved this particular woman in the Valley of Sorek, which is, if you will, the Napa Valley.

of that particular region. And he fell in love with a woman named Delilah. And by the way, her name means weakness.

It means a dark night. It means oppressed people.

by a dark desire. That's what her name meant. I don't know about you, but if I knew what her name meant, I would be walking the other way.

She nagged and begged and seduced him to compromise what God had clearly told him not to do regarding his hair.

And the sad thing that happened in Judges chapter 16, verse 18 through 21, listen to this. He did not know.

that the Lord had left him.

Boy, you know, how would you like to be left to your own devices where you no longer hear that prompting of the Holy Spirit saying, hey, ask for the ancient paths and walk it when we no longer had the Holy Spirit convicting this of sin righteousness and judgment as ethical leaders the scripture says He did not know that the Lord had left him. Let me just read that very quickly.

When Delilah saw that Samson told her all of his heart, She sent and called the lords of the Philistines. And she said, come up once again, for he has told me his secret.

The lords of the Philistines came up to her, brought the money in her hands. She made him sleep on her knees. She called a man, have him shave off the seven locks of his head.

and she began to torment him, and his strength left him. And she said, The Philistines are upon you, Samson. And when he awoke from the deep sleep, He says, I'll go out like all other times and shake myself free. But he did not know that the Lord left him.

The Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes, brought him down to Gaza, bound him with the bronze shackles and put him grinding at the mill in a prison.

I think that's, again, sobering for all of us that we can get so busy. Perhaps we fill our calendar with so many activities.

We don't have that white space when we can focus on the Lord and, you know, like Samuel said, speak, Lord, your servant's listening.

And we can fall prey to doing things our way. We can say, I've got all this wonderful, vast experience as a leader.

I know what to do next and we can get involved in awful things.

John Maxwell in his Leadership Bible outlines signs when leaders are in trouble.

He said, first of all, you're in trouble when you fail to address a glaring character flaw that you have. I hope that you and all.

know ourselves and know when we're approaching that edge, when we are making ethical, moral, relational, spiritual decisions in the flesh.

We know when those times when we've not had enough sleep or we're facing stressful situations or our life is just overloaded. Or we know we have that...

We know those things that set us off and cause us to say the things or do the things that we should not. And one of the first scriptures that I learned was as a young teenager.

from 1 Corinthians 10, 13. There's no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man. But God is faithful.

And not he will not allow you to be tempted above that you are able, but will with every temptation make a way for you to escape.

that you can bear the temptation. Isn't it amazing that God And I don't know about you, but my track record with the Lord is when I'm walking down a treacherous path, let's say like Balaam.

I mean, everybody's trying to tell you this is not good. I mean, God even had a donkey speak to Balaam I have those moments when the Holy Spirit prompts me, be careful. Secondly, John Maxwell says, when you count on deception to safeguard yourself. David Powelson, who's a Christian counselor, said, When you create a secret garden of any sort of thing in your life, beware. Mutant things will inevitably grow.

Let me read that again. When you create a secret garden of any sort in your life, be careful.

Mutant things inevitably grow from it. John Maxwell also said You know that you're in danger when you act impulsively, on a whim, or you're overcome by a weak area.

Are you misused? You misuse the God-given gifts. I'm going to the Southern Baptist Convention next week. We have 700 pastors over the last 15 years who have violated their sacred act relationship of trust as an ordained minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In many cases, they've misused their relationship, their gift of authority to to satisfy one of their own sinful sexual desires. You know that these gifts of leadership that God gives us We have to be very careful because we can't misuse the gift of God for our own selfish desires. God help us.

In fact, the scripture says, be careful because sin crouches at our door. Satan, he knows our number.

But are you grateful that God greater is he who's in us than he who's in the world? Let me be a little more positive here so we see what Simpson's issues were, but I want to focus primarily on God's mercy in spite of of Samson's failures.

Throughout the story, you have the angel of the Lord speaking to Samson's parents, telling them you're going to have a miraculous baby.

He begins to save Israel from the Philistines. The angel continues to appear and begin stirring in the lives of Samson's family. In chapter 14, verse 5, a young lion began to attack Samson. And the scripture says, and the spirit of the Lord rushed on him. Chapter 15.

The Philistines attacked Samson, and the spirit of the Lord rushed on him, and the ropes in which he was bound melted.



and i didn't read the rest of this passage here so here's samson he was thrown in jail a poor slave blind But listen to the mercy of God. And while he was in prison, the hair of his head began to grow again.

after it had been shaved.

That's the mercy of God saying, hey, Samson, in spite of your miserable failure, you haven't listened to me. You have rebelled.

You've shared the secret of your strength, your Nazarite locks. But I'm going to make your hair grow again. I'm going to be merciful to you.

And as you all know, there was one more act that God gave him. And when all of the Worshipers of Dagon were gathered in one place. God used him to take all of the enemy out. And here's the lesson.

In spite of our ethical failures, and all of us have sinned and come short of the glory of God, we've all sinned.

I think we've all had our failures. We've not been perfect. God is a God of mercy. He redeems wasted, broken lives.

He makes all things new. I think of Chuck Colson. Here he was advising the president of the United States, President Nixon.

And he allowed power to get to him. And yet in prison, of all the places, he found freedom in Christ.

We can fail miserably and fall prey to sin that so easily besets us, but God always comes. He is faithful and true to come and set us free.

Because he's a God of mercy.

Samson's story, although a life that he wasted and many, many ethical and moral failures.

He had an unforgiving minute in which God redeemed him.

As the Philistines gathered to sacrifice to their God, they called out for Samson to come and entertain him. And they laughed and they mocked at him.

And notice what he did that he had not done in four chapters. In chapter 16, the scripture says he prayed.

He prayed to God and listened to his prayer. And by the way, it took a lockdown for Samson to look up.

He said, O Lord, O Lord God, Jehovah Elohim, Sovereign God, Elohim means the Godhead, Remember me. There's this humility. Remember me. My divine call is as my judge.

Remember me. I trust you, Lord. I'm desperate for you. And strengthen me once more. I surrender myself to you.

may you have the victory not me i don't want another uh award on my belt may you be avenged You are the one that has been shown disgrace. May the eyes of your anointed one see. And the scripture says, Samson had faith.

On his deathbed confession, like a thief on the cross, God answered him.

Samson had looked away from God most of his life, but in the end, blind, he looked up in faith.

And here's a final lesson here. Failure, ethical failure, is only final.

When you refuse to get back up. Failure is only final when you refuse to get back up.

The book of Proverbs chapter 24 verse 16 says, For the righteous fall seven times and rise again, but the wicked will stumble again.

in times of calamity. So as I bring this to conclusion, my questions might be, how are you and I preparing for those unforgiving minutes in our life. I'm thankful to God that there's just not one, but God gives us many opportunities to be good stewards of those unforgiving minutes when we have to get that ethical decision right. Look, they are coming.

You may be in one today.

Unforgiving minutes test our faith and our obedience, and they tempt us to cry out to God, God, remember me. God, may you receive the glory.

God, I surrender my circumstances to you, and I believe you're going to show up.

Maybe you failed the test and some of us, some of you, may even today still be living with that regret of that failed minute, that unforgiving minute in which you blew it.

Here's the good news. Romans 8, 1. There is now, therefore, no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

So I think God would remind us, even if we have fallen down as leaders, stand up, look up.

return to god jesus promises in john chapter 6 verse 37 whoever comes to me i'll never