

**Series: FATHER'S DAY - June 17, 2007**

**WHEN THE IRON MAN RUSTS**  
**Judges 13-16**

**I. INTRO**

- A. I have to confess that I've always admired—no, **envied** the strong guys. I tried to become one—lifted weights, etc., but—well, the visual is better than words!  
-I was on the swimming team for a year. Went out for football—for a day—and got the flu and never went back. I always admired the guys who could play football—and not be afraid to get hit, or get a set of cleats in the face.
1. Now, the problem is, I went to a tough high school. We had riots—riot policemen stationed in the hallways for a while—and some of the toughest kids in our city who went there.  
-Incidentally, I found out in the process of all this that I had at least one gift. I could talk. I could talk tough. Just so no one ever challenged me, I was good.
  2. Now as I watch pro athletes, body builders, weight-lifters—guys who intimidate just by their looks—that there are more guys out there like **me** than like **them!**  
Actually, Lori tells me that she thinks that guys with these big, thick greasy looking muscles gross her out. I sometimes wonder if she's just giving me a line! Oh well, some day it's gonna be the true **revenge of the nerds!**  
-But...I digress...
- B. I did a little research on this whole body-building, weight-lifting thing. It's actually pretty interesting. They have this **Strongest Man Alive** contest. On their website, there's a big Scottish guy lifting what must be a 400 pound round stone.  
However, from the size of him, I don't think I'd make fun of his dress! Then there's the guy from Iceland, Magnus Ver Magnusson who won the Strongest Man contest four times in a row. It involves pulling trains, lifting weights, and changing **really** nasty diapers.
1. But I am glad to tell you that the guy with the biggest chest measurement in the world comes from a town near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania—where I was born.  
His chest measures 6' 2 1/16" around! His routine includes **repetitively** bench-pressing 560 lbs. and curling 300 lbs.!
  2. I found out something else in my study.  
Your chances of winning these contests go up the older you get! If you're in your 40s, you have to beat the record of a guy named Lemuel Grayson who can clean and jerk 407 pounds. But there's only **one guy** in the 90-94 year old category—the competition **really** thins out at that point.  
Hey, this guys is only clean-and-jerking 70 pounds! I can do better than that! You'd think that after practicing all those years, he'd be in better shape! So, I'm all set to win in 2045!
  3. One more thing. Linked with this **Strongest Man Alive** competition is a website called, **Samson Power.com**. Now, where do you think they got **that** idea? Well, the guy pushing the pillars down would be the Samson of the Bible. And if the records are true—and I believe they are—he is the strongest man who **ever** lived.  
-I'd like to tell you his story this morning, cause Samson was the original *Alpha* male! He was one tough guy. But like a lot of people we've seen, his talent and giftedness and charisma took him way, **way** off course.

## II. THE GUY WHO HAD IT ALL...

- A. To just be honest, as I read about what these strong guys can lift, press, jerk, pull, and throw, I muttered, **Wow!** And that's why our world **idolizes** giftedness—in looks, strength, musical talent, athletic ability, brains--whatever area someone has **it** in. Giftedness—talent—is the path to the good stuff of life that everyone seems to want.
1. And we're quite conscious of where we stand in the whole pecking order, aren't we? I realized early on that I was near the bottom of the food chain when it came to getting picked for pick-up football or baseball.
    - I never really stood out at anything. After getting kissed a couple of times in first grade, girls never really winked at me or sent me love-notes.
    - In high school, I played the **violin**. It's kinda cool now, but it wasn't then. I wished for violin case that looked more like I was carrying a trumpet or sax or machine gun—but my case was shaped like a girl's body. My brother was 6 feet tall. I got the 5'8" gene.
    - When I contrasted myself with the giftedness and talent and assets of other guys, there's one word that describes how I really felt. **Envy**. And I think my feelings are pretty common in a world where talent, giftedness, ability and brains are flaunted and compared.
  2. Think of the TV shows, like **American Idol**, and **Canada's Next Top Model**. Think of what happens in almost every Junior Hockey League and ever Soccer League, and every dance competition and every school. I'd say we live in a culture that **worships** giftedness! So, I thought, in a culture like ours, a mass confession might be good for our souls!
    - If you've ever envied someone else's giftedness—their looks, youth, athletic ability, musical ability, IQ, education, status, waistline, hairline, or bottom line—raise your hand. High!**
    - Good! We're all on the same page!**
- B. Whatever talent or ability or gifts or brains you may have, there is a companion quality that is absolutely essential if you are going to use your gifts well and not crash and burn. In fact **without** this, talent and giftedness alone will take you down. It's called **character**. Samson's story is a story about what happens when you have it all—except character.
1. Samson's start actually came before he was born—and was quite spectacular. Just like with Samuel and John the Baptist, an angel visited a woman struggling with infertility—and told her that she would have a son lavishly gifted; a son God planned to use as a powerful leader.
    - The intent is that God will use him to deliver the Jews from 40 years of living under the domination of their pagan neighbors, the Philistines. The Lord told them that Samson was to be raised as a **Nazirite**—and live under three special vows of devotion to God. These are listed in Numbers 6, if you want to read it for yourself.
      - a. First, he is not to go near a dead body of any kind for any reason.
      - b. Second, he had to give up wine, grapes and all alcoholic drinks.
      - c. Third, and let me read this straight from the text,
        - “They must never cut their hair throughout the time of their vow, for they are holy and set apart to the LORD (Numbers 6:5 NLT).**
        - In other words, he must let his hair grow long. The Hebrew word for “cut” or “razor” in Hebrew is **huppai**. We get the word **Hippie** from that word. Actually, that's not true!

-Now, there is nothing *moral* about these things; but they are symbolic reminders that, for a time, a person has fully devoted themselves to do something for God. For Samson, these vows weren't temporary--they were to be a lifestyle. Now, we'll come back to these vows because they're very important in this story.

2. In Samson's world, physical strength is a huge deal—and this guy is unmatched in that area. He is such a dazzling specimen of manhood that other guys wanted to be like him and women wanted to be with him. From what we can see, he had a kind of magnetism and charisma to him. In that culture, God raised him up as what is called a “judge”—not as a in the legal sense, but as the supreme military and political leader of Israel. He was the “big dog.” People would say, “Samson, **you de man!**” And he would say, “Yeah, I **am de man!**”

-To get a grip on Samson, think of someone in our day who is combination of a champion body builder, a movie star, and a political leader—kind of a **Governator** of a popular state with a lot of money and sex appeal. Can you think of anyone like that?

-But Samson had way more than that. He had the calling of God on him to fulfill—not his own personal dreams—but a plan of God for all time. Something you need to know to understand Samson's story. Sometimes God uses him because of what he does; but early in his story, it's clear that God mostly uses him *despite* what he does and how he acts and the choices he makes. This is story is rated 14A. Samson makes some truly *raunchy, stupid* choices.

3. Well, Samson grows up—and very early on we get some insights into his character.

**One day when Samson was in Timnah, one of the Philistine women caught his eye. When he returned home, he told his father and mother, “A young Philistine woman in Timnah caught my eye. I want to marry her. Get her for me.” His father and mother objected. “Isn't there even one woman in our tribe or among all the Israelites you could marry?” they asked. “Why must you go to the pagan Philistines to find a wife?” But Samson told his father, “Get her for me! She looks good to me (Judges 14:1-4 NLT).”**

- a. Now, how well did Samson know this girl? She *caught his eye*. “There she was, just a walkin' down the street, singin' *doo-wah didi didi dum didi doo.*” And his qualifications for a partner are actually pretty clear. She wasn't in his university class—and he was amazed by her brilliant mind.

He wasn't serving the homeless with her and taken with her heart. “**Get her for me! She looks good to me!**”

-Notice his attitude toward his parents. “I want to marry her. **Get her for me!**” **Total** disrespect--unheard of in that culture. It's bully language. And you see this pattern throughout the story. **He saw. He wanted. He got.**

- b. Now, his mother and father are appalled at his choice. The *pagan Philistines*, as they describe them, were as far away from Israel's values and culture as you could get. They worshipped a god they called **Baal-zebub** through child sacrifice and cultic prostitution.

-The Hebrews contemptuously called this god, **Beelzebub**, which is translated, “lord dung face” or “lord of the flies.” In Matthew, he is called the

Prince of Demons. In other words, their religion would be the rough equivalent of Satan worship.

-Do you understand why Samson's parents were concerned? His birth had been announced by an angel—that he would be a leader empowered by God. He was a child of promise. And now **this!**

- c. Woody Allen was questioned by the press a number of years ago about a secret sexual relationship he had with an adopted daughter—whom he then married. Several weeks ago, I quoted his answer: “The heart wants what it wants!”

-I don't always trust what my heart wants. I can't, I'm ashamed to say—cause it's split. There is part of it that really wants to please God, but there's a selfish part. “I see, I want, I take.” And the problem with Samson—and the problem with us—is that unless our heart is transformed and changed, we will use the gifts and talents God has given us to get what the dark side of the heart wants.

4. Well, on the way to **get** this Philistine girl, he's attacked by a young lion. The Spirit of God came on him, filled him with power, and he literally ripped this lion's jaws in half with his bare hands. Kills it. Think about that. I do nightcrawlers really well—but lions?

-Later, he's walking past what's left of this lion and notices that bees have deposited a honeycomb inside it's carcass. So he sticks his hand in this thing, gets a handful of honey—eats some—and then gives some to his parents.

**But he didn't tell them he had taken the honey from the carcass of the lion (Judges 14:9 NLT).** Can anyone guess why not? He had just broken the first vow made to God. See the pattern. He was hungry. So...he saw, he wanted, he took. His desires are running his life.

-And when something is going wrong in a person's character—whether it's in the church, in politics—wherever—the first sign is a period of hiding, secrecy and deception.

5. Well, the whole wedding thing starts going down. Listen to what happens next. **As his father was making final arrangements for the marriage, Samson threw a party at Timnah, as was the custom for elite young men (Judges 14:11 NLT).**

-The word for party literally means **drinking orgy**—And the thing lasted a week! Anyone remember a vow that deals with this—about drinking wine or alcohol? Samson cooked this vow too. Now there's only one vow left.

-It's at this party that Samson gets into more trouble. He has this riddle that has to do with the honey that came from the lion and has a bet going that these Philistine guys won't guess it. They can't, so they go after his fiancée. They tell her that if she doesn't somehow force the secret out of Samson—they'll burn her and her whole family to death. And it's here that Samson's weakness and lack of character begins to show. Listen to what happens!

**So she cried whenever she was with him and kept it up for the rest of the celebration. At last, on the seventh day he told her the answer because she was tormenting him with her nagging (Judges 14:17 NLT)**

-Samson, strongest man who's **ever** lived, can't handle it when his bride turns on the tears! So, she spills the beans—and Samson starts down this trail of retaliation. He finds out her Dad has married her to his best man.

So, for revenge, Samson devastates their economy by burning down their fields, orchards and vineyards. They burn the Philistine girl and her father alive. So he slaughters a bunch of them. They hunt him down—he pretends to surrender, but grabs the jawbone of a donkey and kills 1000 of them.

-Now, remember, Samson is the judge, the spiritual and military leader of Israel, and yet he goes for a night with a Philistine cult prostitute. While he's with her, soldiers, still out to get him, trap him in the city. So, with his bare hands, he rips the city gates—weighing tons--right off their foundations. That's not all--he **carries** them to the top of a hill—estimated to be a few **miles** away—leaving their city defenseless. Notice something. Samson not only flaunts his sexual adventures in God's face, he uses the supernatural gifts God has given him to lead a nation—all for his own personal revenge.

6. Anyone ever heard of **Delilah**? Well—she's Samson's last lover—and yeah, she's a Philistine too. Same old thing. Lust, betrayal, anger and revenge. The Philistines work on Delilah—and offer her an extraordinary amount of money to wheedle Samson's secret out of him--and betray him.
- a. It works, Delilah keeps whining and asking, "What's the secret to your strength?" Samson's like this big dumb ox, who keeps messing with her—but getting closer and closer to the truth. Then this:

**Then Delilah pouted, "How can you tell me, 'I love you,' when you don't share your secrets with me? You've made fun of me three times now, and you still haven't told me what makes you so strong!" She tormented him with her nagging day after day until he was sick to death of it. Finally, Samson shared his secret with her. "My hair has never been cut," he confessed, "for I was dedicated to God as a Nazirite from birth. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as anyone else (Judges 16:15-17 NLT)."**

-Remember the quote I gave you several months ago? **Nagging is like getting nibbled to death by a duck!** It's Delilah's secret weapon to take down the strongest man who's ever lived!

-Samson has just blown his third and last vow to God. Many of you know the rest of the story. He goes to sleep, Delilah shaves his head and ties him up. When the Philistine soldiers come to haul him off—he jumps up thinking that he'll just break the ropes and get away, like he had so many times before. Then this really, really sad statement:

**But he didn't realize the LORD had left him (Judges 16:20b).**

- b. Samson's character was so eroded, he didn't even realize God was gone. Then the soldiers gouged out his eyes. Interesting, isn't it—that this guy who lived by the philosophy, **I see, I want, I get**—had his eyes taken from him. And then they put him to work grinding grain—something that women primarily did in that culture.

-Think of what Samson had: Strongest man who ever lived, the guy who had it all, one of the most magnificently gifted people who's ever lived, his

birth announced by angels, a man who's called by God to great things— but **never** does them.

7. Most guys look at our culture's version of a guy like Samson and think, "Wow! If I had that talent, that kind of body, that strength, that ability to make deals happen, that charisma—**then** I'd be really happy!"  
 -Friends, the most powerful lesson in Samson's story is that there is a **burden** that comes with giftedness. Temptations. A whole way of thinking that comes when people surround you and o-o-o and a-a-ah over your **gifts** or **talents**. You begin to believe your own press. When you speak, people listen—and you begin to think you're more important, smarter, better, and stronger than you really are. These pressures come—and if you don't have character, your giftedness will crush you—just like it did Samson. Called and empowered by God with unbelievable gifts— but **never** fulfills the mission God had for him.

### III. ...EXCEPT CHARACTER

- A. Let me just repeat myself here. We live in a world that **idolizes** talent and gifts. If we're not careful, we can make talents and gifts and looks and brains and education and charisma and training the goal of life. Parents—Dads—it is **so** easy to get sucked into this mentality.

-The pressure parents face is to make our time with our kids pretty much all about developing their brains, their bodies, their talent, their music and their gifts—and parents in our world will pay almost any price, travel almost any where to do that.

-Now, understand--it's a **good** thing to have these gifts: a well-trained mind, a great slap shot or kick or move, a phenomenal music gift—to get voted "most likely to succeed"—to have the talent of making money, making people laugh, and being the star of the show. God has given us gifts to develop and use.

-But compared to **character**—gifts are **nothing**. Paul, early leader and writer, once wrote to a very gifted—but arrogant—church,

**If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1-2, NLT).**

-The equation goes like this;

**GIFTS + TALENTS minus LOVE/CHARACTER = NOISE.**

And if you don't **see** it, this condition leads to blindness, to narcissism, to self-centeredness, to selfishness—and self-destruction. Why? Because **God** set life up, **God** gives all the gifts, and **life is not about me—or you**.

1. Everyone understand what a **gift** is? By definition, a **gift** is not deserved or earned or won through superior performance. All our gifts come from God. He gives them, not to inflate our egos or make us rich and famous or make us the shining stars we'd always dreamed we'd be—but to **serve**. **Serve Him and others**.

-Without character—without the power of God to love Him and love others, our gifts will almost surely be used to make our lives about us—just like Samson did. And we'll begin to believe that we're **more** special, **more** desirable and **more** worthy than others.

-Think about how that happens in our world. Someone is significantly gifted with qualities our culture worships—like athletics, music, brains, or making money. Then coaches and teachers and talent scouts—and sometimes, parents--cater to them, put up with their narcissism and temper tantrums—all the while telling them how wonderful they are. And this is a **recipe** for a train wreck somewhere down the line.

-Friends, write this down somewhere. When all of life gets boiled down and summarized and tallied up—**it's character that win's the day**. Without it, we'll blow every gift we've been given and leave more pain than goodness behind—even if our picture's in the Guinness World Book of Records!

2. Let me get a little more specific about character, just so we're clear. Character is a person's moral and spiritual make-up. It's the word we use when we talk about what someone's **really** like, apart from their talents and gifts and assets. A person's character is behind what they think and feel, behind their intentions and the things they choose. It's what makes a person either trustworthy or undependable; humble or arrogant; giving and generous, or selfish and self-centered.

-When you peel all the outer stuff off of a person's life, their **character** is what they're like underneath—without the accolades, the trophies, the write-ups, the gifts and talents. It's not just who they are when no one's looking—it's **who** they **really** are.

-Almost no one asks the character question in our world. The June 7 edition of the Toronto Star had the Sports headline, **The (Mighty) Ducks Rule**. People read the story about Teemu Selanne and how well he played that championship game, and no one asks, "But what kind of person is he **really**?" The Entertainment section had an article, **50 Reasons To Love Stephen King**—but no one asks, "But does Stephen King love others? Is he humble or arrogant?" Why? Because we live in a world that idolizes and celebrates **talent** and **giftedness** and **charisma**—and acts as if that's all that matters. Period.

-Then when people with all this stuff—without the character to hold it up—crash and burn, go to rehab or jail or get charged with drunk driving, rape or assault or do something weird or crazy—we act surprised. "Why would a person who has it all **do** something like that?" Hello! Read history!

- B. After the service today, we have a number of great cars for you car buffs to look through—just after! Of course, what will immediately catch your eye is the exterior. The classic lines of a 1965 Chrysler Imperial, or the gleam of a Rolls Royce or the sex appeal of a Ferrari or Porsche.
 

-But the bottom line question is—does it actually **run**? If you see a Ferrari out there—and find out that it actually doesn't have an engine—like, the engine blew some time ago—and the owner just brought it here on a truck and pushed it off the back—that would take away some of the appeal, wouldn't it?

-Car guys know that how well you take care of the motor is pretty important. You have to give it the best fuel. You have to change the oil. Cause, see the **main** thing about a car isn't the paint job or the leather interior; it's **does it run**? A car is never intended to sit in a garage or by a curb and look cool; it's intended to serve its owner.

1. And that's my point. We are here—on earth—not to look cool, or sexy—or to impress others with our exterior. We're here to serve the One who owns us. He didn't give us the gifts we have to pump up our egos and impress others. If that's what we do, we miss the point of why we're here.
2. Something else about cars. They age. I don't know if you've noticed, but there aren't a whole lot of 100 year old people around—and there aren't a whole lot of 100 year old cars around. Rust happens. Deterioration happens.
  - I noticed something very interesting as I researched weight-lifting. The amount of weight it took to set a record diminished the older the age category got. By the time a guy got into his late 60s, it had about dropped in half. By the 80s? It was about a third.
  - I've noticed that about gifts, talents, looks, ability and all the other stuff our world celebrates. All of these reach a peak—then gradually diminish. It reminds me of one of those coffee cups that has a frog imbedded inside. Ever seen one? You don't see it when the cup's full. But as the cup gradually empties, sip by sip, you see the frog. First the tip of it's head—and eventually it's entire croaky self!
  - Character is a little like that—although my character hopefully doesn't look like a frog with warts! But as the cup of giftedness and life gradually empties—character—good or bad—is eventually all that's left.
3. The end to Samson's life is quick—and spectacular. We find him in prison—and the writer wryly states,
 

***But before long, his hair began to grow back (Judges 16:22 NLT).***

  - The Philistines were thrilled with their victory over Samson—and at a massive drunken party celebrating their god—brought him out to “amuse” them. He stood between two massive pillars that held up the entire roof over the temple.
  - Remember the ***Samson Power*** logo I mentioned at the beginning? With Samson taking out the pillars? They seem to forget is that Samson **died** in the process! He called out to God: ***Sovereign Lord, remember me again. O God, please strengthen me just one more time.*** He heaved on these pillars and the whole temple crashed—taking out the Philistine leaders and all the people there to see the show.
4. The tragedy about Samson is that he died without ever having a chance to live with character; to lead; to serve others. The good news is that at the end of his life, when he had messed up everything, wasted his opportunities—when he was humiliated and blind and broken—God still heard his voice. God still loved old Samson! See, He doesn't love us because we're gifted or talented. And he doesn't love us because we have sterling character, either. God loves us because He's God—and He can't help himself.
5. It's possible that down deep inside, there's a cry in your heart that says, “I want to be more than a bundle of gifts and talents. I want to have depth! I want to make a difference in this world—no matter what ***anybody*** thinks of me!”

-Well, you've just synched up with what God wants! Remember what happened when Samson broke his final vow? God left—and he didn't even know? Well, when we synch up with God and His will—the reverse of that happens. God **comes**. And character, depth, love, humility and power is what He does best in us when he's given half that chance. He'd start right now, in fact!

#### IV. **CLOSING THOUGHTS**

Remember the title? When the iron man rusts? That kinda happens over time, I guess. But there's one iron man I know of who doesn't seem to rust. And he has actually run the iron man triathlon—only with a twist. In this case, he's used his strength and ability to inspire others. I think you'll be moved by his story. Watch.