

Judges 13

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[0 : 00] Bringing up kids is no picnic, and it would seem that we're getting worse rather than better at that important task.

I was just listening to the radio this past week as I was driving from, I don't know, from one place to another, and on Five Live, I think it was, there was one of these discussion programs about this matter, and I think it arose from the fact that teachers, especially teachers in the early years, primary one I think was the focus, are discovering that many of their new pupils starting school for the first time, certainly starting primary school for the first time, lack some very basic skills that seemingly in previous generations or in previous decades, they would have had at least to a greater extent.

Even being able to sit properly in a chair, that was one of the things that was particularly highlighted. Holding a pencil, putting on their coat, going to the toilet, some basic skills that you would imagine that children might have by that stage were missing in the case, certainly, of some. Now, why would that be? Now, we're not thinking here particularly of children who, for no fault of their own, have particular challenges to do with health difficulties.

That's not what is in mind, but kids who seemingly enjoy good health, physical and mental health, and yet they're lacking in these skills. And what would the reason be?

[1 : 40] Well, it's not really rocket science. The reason they're lacking these skills is that they've not been taught these skills. And obviously, if you've not been taught, then you're not going to know.

And in the light of this, the call that is heard is for government-funded and organized parenting classes to help tackle what is deemed to be, so some would contend in any case, a growing problem.

Now, where does the church fit in to this picture? Do we, as the church, as a congregation of God's people, do we have any locus in the matter of bringing up children?

Of course, we can, as we have done on a couple of occasions, helpfully, I think, run a course for parents, a parenting course, and that can be helpful for some of those who participate.

But I think our responsibility runs much deeper than that. At the heart of our mission and calling as the church is that we pass on the faith to the next generation.

[2 : 56] This is a theme that we find constantly in the Bible, this responsibility, this privilege of passing on the faith.

Let me just read to you words that Paul writes in his letter to the Corinthians. They're words that don't apply exclusively to the responsibility of passing on the faith to our children.

They're broader than that, but they certainly can be applied to this responsibility. In 1 Corinthians chapter 15, and in verses 3 and 4, he writes, For I delivered to you, as of first importance, what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised in the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and he goes on.

The point is that Paul had received this, he'd received it, and now he had a responsibility to pass it on. And so too with us. And it's true that that responsibility extends beyond passing it on to our children.

We are to pass it on to others. But it certainly is the case that we have a particular responsibility to pass on the faith to our own children.

[4 : 14] And when I say our children, I think we can rightly understand that expression, our children, as being applicable not only to parents, but within a congregation, within a believing community, all of us can speak of our children in reference to the children that form part of the congregation.

But what has this got to do with the book of Judges? The book of Judges is hardly a parenting manual, and yet the chapter before us this morning does provide us with some challenging insights into marriage and parenting.

Now, as we've been going through this book over the weeks, what we've tried to do largely is to see the big picture of God's big story of redemption.

But it doesn't always have to be the big picture that occupies our attention. And this morning we're going to leave to one side largely the big picture and enjoy a little picture.

A little picture of pious parents. And I use the word pious in a very positive sense. I know sometimes it's used negatively, but here I'm using it very positively.

[5 : 35] A little picture of pious parents. And I'm talking about Samson's mom and dad. Mr. and Mrs. Manoa. We're not given Samson's mother's name.

And so we'll refer to them in this way. Now, I can't imagine that Manoa and his good wife ever went on a marriage or a parenting course, but they can teach us a thing or two about both subjects.

And as we observe and learn, I want to stress that the lessons to be learned are not just for couples or parents. Obviously, they apply very particularly to marriages and to parents.

But the lessons that can be drawn can also apply and do apply to all who form part of this congregation, of this covenant community with a responsibility for our children, as that expression was explained just a moment ago.

Now, before we do focus in on Mr. and Mrs. Manoa, we do need to have some sense of the times in which they lived. And this will involve noting something of the big picture.

[6 : 53] So, I'm sorry, I can't help myself. We do need to just at least touch on the big picture as we enter into what we want to find out. And, of course, a good place of having some idea of the times in which they lived, the context in which this story takes place, is at the beginning of the chapter.

Again, the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, so the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines for 40 years. Very familiar pattern that we've come across so often in the book of Judges. Just a few verses on, you also have this promise of a Redeemer, of a Deliverer, Samson, who would begin the deliverance of Israel.

There in verse 5, in the second half of the verse, very telling language, he will begin the deliverance of Israel. There you have then these elements that we're always coming across in this story or in this period of the Judges.

You have rebellion. The people did evil in the eyes of the Lord. You have retribution as they suffer the consequences and are delivered into the hands of the Philistines. You have redemption as a man is raised up to deliver God's people.

[8 : 17] Rebellion, retribution, redemption. But there's one R missing that we often discover in the pattern that often repeats itself.

And the R that's missing is repentance. There's no mention here of repentance. There's rebellion. There's retribution. There's the promise of redemption. But no reference, it would seem, to repentance.

Why is God working at all in the absence of repentance? Well, there's only one word that can answer that question, and the word is grace.

This was a time of rebellion and redemption in parallel. Is that not so often God's way? God doesn't wait for us to get right with Him before He delivers us.

He doesn't wait for us to do the right thing and then step in to save us. No, in parallel you have man's rebellion, our rebellion, and God taking this redemptive initiative.

[9 : 20] Grace abounding for a rebellious people, but grace also for this childless couple who no doubt had known great sadness because of their childlessness.

So let's move on to learn from Mr. and Mrs. Manoa. And I want to draw your attention, quite fleetingly really, but to five characteristics of this godly marriage.

And even as we enter into identifying these characteristics, it's important to be clear that the idea isn't that we would slavishly copy Manoa and his wife.

They were far from perfect, I'm sure. And their circumstances were, in some respects, very different to ours. That said, we can learn from them as we note and appreciate godly practice and enduring principles.

So let's notice the first characteristic of this marriage, of these parents. And it is this, their marriage was grounded in trust. Their marriage was grounded in trust.

[10:31] And there are two aspects to this. They trusted God, but also they trusted each other. When we think of this first aspect that becomes apparent in the passage, their trust in God.

Their simple and yet solid trust in God is striking and admirable. We've read the passage, and sometimes I'll simply make reference to what we've read without maybe just drawing attention to the specific verse.

But on other occasions, maybe I will highlight the verse in question. But, you know, we have read the passage. Manoah's wife is the first to receive the news that she is to give birth to a child. This messenger, this man of God, this one who appeared to her like an angel, comes and tells her that this is what's going to happen. And we don't discover in the passage even a hint of doubt on the part of Manoah's wife.

Not for a moment does she question whether this will indeed take place. She believes the message. She trusts in the message that has been brought to her.

[11:45] But in this matter of trusting God, she is not alone. She and her husband are of one mind.

Notice the manner in which Manoah, in speaking of the announced arrival of their son, uses the language of when and not if. On two occasions, very explicitly, we have this language used that makes it very clear that he shares his wife's conviction that the message is true and that this will indeed happen.

Notice in verse 12, when Manoah is in dialogue with this man of God, this angel, notice what he says. When your words are fulfilled, what is to be the rule for the boy's life and work?

But especially how he introduces the question he's got. When your words are fulfilled. He doesn't say if your words are fulfilled. No, when your words are fulfilled. He is persuaded that they will be fulfilled.

We find the same language in verse 17. Then Manoah inquired of the angel of the Lord, What is your name so that we may honor you when your word comes true?

[13:00] Just even in this use of the word when, we have a lesson, don't we, in believing in God. Not if your word comes true, but when your words come true, what should I do?

So this marriage of Manoah and his wife is grounded in their shared trust in God. And this trust in God is evidenced by their acceptance of and belief in his word delivered by his messenger.

And in that regard, nothing has changed. The way we give evidence of our trust in God is as we believe in his word delivered to us through his messengers that we have recorded for us in the Bible.

And it is a beautiful and a powerful thing when a husband and wife are united in trusting in God and in believing his word. Are you, those of you who do form part of a marriage, of a couple, are you united in your trust and faith in God?

And broadening this to our congregation, entrusted with passing on the faith to the succeeding generation, are we united in our faith and trust in God?

[14:17] Do our children receive or witness mixed signals as they look to us and what we say and the measure in which we believe?

So they trusted in God. They were united in that regard. But they also trusted one another. When Manoah's wife receives her angelic visitor, the very first thing that she does is look for her husband to tell him everything that has happened.

We find that there in verse 6. There's no fear, it would seem, on the part of Manoah's wife of being dismissed or belittled. There's no fear of her husband saying, well, you're clearly talking nonsense. You know, these things simply don't happen. No, there is that trust between them that leads her to go to him, first of all, and say, look, this is what's happened. No doubt.

Wanting to share the good news, but also to hear what he would say to her in the light of what she has been told. And Manoah, for his part, doesn't disappoint.

[15:22] As a husband, he listens to his wife, and he believes his wife. He's received the message secondhand, you might say. In due course, he meets this man, but at this point he hasn't.

He simply has to take his wife at her word, and he does. And why does he? Because he trusts her. They trust each other. They trust in God, but also they trust each other.

Their marriage was grounded in trust. And we could develop that in terms of how important that is for us, but I think it's sufficiently evident for us not to spend time doing that.

Let's move on to a second characteristic of this couple, of this marriage, of these parents. And it is this, that they needed help, and they knew it.

They needed help, and they knew it. And as we speak about this matter of them needing help, we can maybe distinguish three elements. The help needed, the help sought, and the help granted.

[16:25] So first of all then, the help needed. The help that they needed is simply but eloquently put by Manoah in his prayer.

He's heard the message that's been passed on to him by his wife. And notice that in verse 8, what Manoah prays. Then Manoah prayed to the Lord, O Lord, I beg you, let the man of God you sent to us come again to teach us how to bring up the boy who is to be born.

He is very clear as to what his need is, what help he requires. He needs help. They need help to bring up the boy. There's a commendable and refreshing honesty to Manoah that is so appealing. He needs help, and he knows it. Of course, we know that recognizing our need of help is fundamental in every area of life.

But here in particular, as we think of the responsibility of bringing up our children, we need help. We can't do it by ourselves. We fall short. We're lacking often in the skills, in the knowledge, in the wisdom.

[17:40] We need help. Manoah very clearly was conscious that he needed help, hence the request that he makes. That the man would come and help us to bring up the child or give us instruction as to how we are to do so.

I wonder if sometimes we're too proud to acknowledge that we need help. Maybe in this very matter we think, well, how difficult can it be? People have been doing it for centuries.

Well, not so Manoah. He needed help, and he knew that he needed help. So that's the help that was needed. But then we have the matter of how that help is sought.

Where is it that Manoah goes looking for help? Well, it's clear. Manoah prays. Is this a mere formality? A bit like this can be, or not to be, but can be.

By no means. The language that we discover that Manoah uses shows it very clearly to be not any mere formality. Let's return to verse 8 and notice the manner in which Manoah prays to the Lord.

[18:53] Oh, Lord, I beg you. He's begging God. What's he begging for? He's begging for help that he would be taught to bring up the boy. Isn't that a striking thing?

Here's this father-to-be, and he's begging of God. And what's he begging for? He's begging for help that he would be able to bring up the boy in the manner that he ought to.

And he goes to God asking for that help. I think the lesson, again, for us is very evident. We need to be praying parents and a praying covenant community.

We need to be a people not only conscious of our need of help, but single-minded in seeking that help. In the first instance, from God, in prayer, but also from one another.

And it's never too late to start. If we've let, perhaps months or years go by and not done as we ought to have done in this matter. And if we would start or if we would continue, let's do so together as with Manoah and his wife.

[19:58] Again, notice what Manoah says as he prays to God. You might say, well, it's Manoah that's praying. No reference here to his wife. Maybe she wasn't interested in asking God for help.

But notice what Manoah says. I think it's revealing. Verse 8 again. If you follow the flow of the story, it seems perfectly reasonable to imagine that this is a prayer that is raised up to God in the presence of his wife.

They've discovered this news, this startling news. And what do they instinctively do? They pray together. Manoah, exercising commendable spiritual headship, is the one who verbalizes the prayer.

But they are in this together. And even the language that Manoah used, help us, I think, confirms that in this matter they are of one mind.

So the help needed, the help sought from God, but then also the help that is granted. What is recorded in the immediately following verse in verse 9 is recorded in such a manner of fact way.

[21:16] And yet it's very significant. We read that in verse 9, God heard Manoah and the angel of God came again. It's exactly what he'd been asking for. Send the man of God again.

God hears and he sends. He answers the prayer that is made. He grants the request that is sought. Now, I claim no depth of insight or startling originality in making this point, but it's still worth making. God answers prayer.

He gives help to those who ask for help. And sometimes it is good to just pause and remind ourselves of simple yet profound truths.

And when we think of this matter of bringing up our children, the greatest good we can do for our children is not what we can give to them, but the measure in which we pray for them.

[22 : 14] This is what we find in Manoah and his wife. From the moment that they discover that they are going to be parents, immediately they turn to God asking for help.

So, their marriage is grounded in trust. They needed help and they knew it. But also we find in this story that Manoah and his wife had a clear duty to perform.

And I think we can helpfully, I hope helpfully, distinguish between what their duty was and what it was not. So, let's begin with what their duty was.

Verses 13 and 14. This is who we discover to be the angel of the Lord, responding to Manoah's question in verse 12.

And the answer that he has given is as follows. The angel of the Lord answered, Your wife must do all that I have told her. Then he repeats what he had already told her in his first encounter with Manoah's wife.

[23 : 17] And then he summarizes the matter at the end of verse 14. She must do everything I have commanded her. What was their duty?

What was their principal duty? Well, it was simply this, to obey. That is what they had to do. They had to obey God. And let's be clear that both are involved in this matter of obedience.

It's true that the angel speaks very specifically of a duty that had been laid upon Manoah's wife. But he's emphasizing the importance of that to Manoah.

Clearly, Manoah was to be involved in helping his wife obey the command that had been given.

Both of them were to acknowledge this as their principal duty as parents.

And it was simply this, to obey God. This is our duty as parents and as a covenant community, to obey God in everything, and in particular, in the matter of bringing up our children.

[24 : 27] Now, the particular duties that are laid upon us in the Bible won't be exactly the same, as was the case with Manoah and his wife. This particular matter of the Nazarite vow that was made on behalf of Samson.

That was something that was relevant for them at this particular juncture. But the principal remains for us. That was their duty, then, put very simply, to obey.

What was not their duty? In some ways, this is more intriguing, because it's maybe what we wouldn't immediately imagine. What was not their duty? What was not their ultimate responsibility, to put it that way?

Well, what was not their duty, what was not their ultimate responsibility as parents, was the outcome of their obedience. That lay in God's hands. It is curious to notice the question that Manoah asks in verse 12.

He says, When your words are fulfilled, we've already noticed how this demonstrates the reality of his faith. But then what does he actually ask? He says, What is to be the rule for the boy's life and work?

[25 : 34] The question's an intriguing one, but more revealing is the answer that he's given, or rather, the answer that he's not given. You see, in answering the question that he poses about, what's the outcome going to be?

You know, this son that's going to be born, you know, who's he going to be? What's he going to do? I really want to know. Quite understandable that he would want to know. What is the answer that he's given?

And the answer that he's given is simply a repetition of what the man of God, the angel of the Lord, had already told his wife. And it was simply, Look, you just do what you're told.

You obey what I am telling you to do. The outcome? You leave that to me. He's not given an answer to his question. And I think it's revealing and instructive and important to realize that he's not given that answer.

What God is saying is to Manoah and his wife as parents, You do your duty, and that is to obey me. Leave the outcome in my hands. I think that's very important for us to remember as parents.

[26 : 41] I think it does give. And I say this carefully, but I say it because I think it is true. I think it can be a comfort to us when sometimes the outcome isn't as we would wish, and with great sincerity and zeal wish.

Our task is to do our duty, and we leave it in God's hand what the ultimate outcome is. They had a clear duty to perform, but then, fourthly, they were intent.

Manoah and his wife were intent on honoring God. From verse 15 through to verse 19, we have Manoah wishing to provide hospitality for their honored guest, who they're still not altogether clear who he is, but he's clearly somebody who has brought a message from God, and they wish to honor him.

And one way in which they wish to honor him is simply by providing hospitality, a meal for this man. That's where it begins. But then the man of God, the angel of the Lord, refuses the meal.

He says, I'm not going to eat anything. But what he does encourage Manoah to do is to convert his meal into a sacrifice, into an act of a worship.

[28 : 02] And Manoah has no hesitation in doing just so. We read there in verse 15, Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, We would like you to stay. Notice there, we would like you to stay.

We, me and my wife, we want you to stay until we prepare a young goat for you. The angel of the Lord replied, Even though you detain me, I will not eat any of your food.

But if you prepare a burnt offering, offer it to the Lord. They honor their guest. And in honoring their guest, they honor God by the hospitality they offer.

But then very particularly as they are exhorted, encouraged to convert this meal into an act of worship, Manoah does not hesitate in doing precisely as he is instructed to do.

In this, they were also united. I have no doubt that Manoah's wife was involved in preparing the meal come sacrifice. They were united in honoring and worshiping God.

[29 : 00] Such parents and such a community is what we need today if we are to faithfully bring up our children in the faith. And notice that Manoah and his wife honor and worship even with a limited understanding that they enjoy.

Certainly at this point in the account. But then finally, a final characteristic of this couple that I want you to think about is the way in which they grew in their knowledge of God.

They grew in their knowledge of God. And in thinking about this, there is an intriguing and also revealing contrast we can identify in the story.

And the contrast really can be summed up in this way. The story highlights the necessary limitations to their knowledge of God, but accompanied by the reality of a personal knowledge or encounter with God.

So on the one hand, it's made very clear that there are limitations to the extent in which Manoah, and by extension any of us, can know God. But that's not to say that we can't know God.

[30 : 14] We're limited, but we can have a real, genuine, personal knowledge of God. Let's think first of all of the limitation intrinsic to Manoah and his wife's humanity.

Notice the question that Manoah poses in verse 17. Then Manoah inquired of the angel of the Lord, What is your name? So that we may honor you when your word comes true.

It's not an unreasonable question, and it's asked, it seems to me, in good faith. But notice the answer that he is given. He replied. The angel of the Lord replied, Why do you ask my name?

It is beyond understanding. You'll notice in a footnote that that expression, beyond understanding, is or can also be translated wonderful. It is beyond understanding.

It is wonderful, very much in the literal meaning of that word wonderful, in that it inspires wonder and awe, precisely because it is so great and so deep and so unfathomable.

[31 : 16] This is the very word that the psalmist uses in Psalm 139, and we've sang the psalm already, but let's just remind ourselves what the psalmist says there in verse 6 of that psalm.

Psalm 139, and in verse 6 we read. Let's read from verse 5. You hem me in behind and before. You have laid your hand upon me. Notice what the psalmist says.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. It's the same word. Such knowledge is beyond understanding for me. The psalmist is acknowledging the greatness of God, the unfathomleness of God.

How inscrutable is God. We can't know Him exhaustively. He is God. And the angel of the Lord says to him, Oh no, you want to know my name? Well, there are things that you can't know.

It's beyond your capacity to understand. Of course, we in our pride rail against that. Something we can't do. Something we can't know.

[32 : 19] But this is what is clear. This is what Manoah is told. There were limitations to his knowledge of God. We find, of course, this repeatedly acknowledged in the Scriptures.

Paul, the apostle Paul, knew this. In Romans chapter 11 and in verse 33, we have a benediction. And it begins with these words, Oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God.

How unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out. The same recognition of the psalmist concerning the limitations that are laid upon us in knowing God.

And yet, and it would be criminal to leave things there. And yet, that does not mean that God is unknowable. God makes himself known in a manner we can grasp and see and understand.

Indeed, in this very story, Manoah and his wife have this wonderful, again using the word, encounter with God. A remarkable encounter in verse 19 in the second half.

[33 : 29] And the Lord did an amazing thing. While Manoah and his wife watched as the flame blazed up from the altar towards heaven, the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame. Seeing this, Manoah and his wife fell with their faces to the ground.

When the angel of the Lord did not show himself again to Manoah and his wife, Manoah realized that it was the angel of the Lord. We are doomed to die, he said to his wife. We have seen God. This was a real encounter with God that Manoah and his wife were granted. And they experienced this together. Seeing this, Manoah and his wife bow down before what is before them.

And again, even in this matter that seems so perhaps alien to our experience of God, we find an example and an encouragement for us that we would, as Christian couples, as parents, as God's people, encounter God together in the study of his word and in the worship of his name.

And notice in this particular instance how helpful it proves to be that both Manoah and his wife experience the same encounter.

[34 : 47] They both are there. They both witness what they witness. And notice the contrast between Manoah and his wife. How they complement each other. Manoah knows his Bible.

He knows the word of God. He concludes, you might say rightly, on the basis of what he knows, of what God has said of himself in the past. He concludes, well, we must die.

We have seen God. We must die. And you say, well, he would have every reason to come to that conclusion on the basis of his understanding. And in Exodus chapter 33 and verse 20, what is it that God himself says?

You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live. And Manoah is aware of this reality. And so when he concludes that they've seen God, he also concludes, well, we must surely die.

He was wrong. But in recognizing that he was wrong, we certainly aren't being critical of him. And one commentator, I think, has put it quite helpfully about Manoah, that he may have been wrong in his inference that they must die.

[35 : 57] But he was right in his instinct that it was an awesome thing to behold a God. In this case, to behold God in a manner that was bearable because God made it a show.

But notice, who puts Manoah right? And this is what is really very touching and very tender. Who puts Manoah right? And husbands take note.

Who puts him right in this matter? Well, it's his wife. It's his wife who puts him right. Manoah concludes, we're going to die. We're doomed. But what does his wife say?

Well, his wife is more practical. And she applies sanctified common sense to the circumstances.

And basically, she concludes, and very sensibly and very reasonably, she concludes, well, we can't die.

And the reason we can't die is that God has promised that we're going to have a son. And if we die, then we won't have a son. And so, we can't die. It's impeccable. Her logic, her faith, reasoning.

[37 : 03] A reasoning faith is applied by Manoah's wife. And she puts her husband right on this matter. She doesn't scold him.

But she puts him right. He got it wrong. And she gets it right. The point is, how they complement each other. How together they can understand something in a way that perhaps separately, it would have been much more difficult to do.

I think the basic principle that we find at the very beginning of the Bible in Genesis, that it's not good for a man to be alone, applies to this matter of growing in our knowledge and understanding of God. Where would Manoah have been without his wife? And this applies to the mutual spiritual help that a husband and wife can provide for one another when they are united in the faith.

But it also applies to the help we can be to one another within a believing community or congregation. I think we can legitimately extend the application more broadly. So, five characteristics, five features of this husband and wife team, of this marriage, of these parents, that allow us to draw lessons that I think are enduring and helpful for us.

[38 : 20] But let's just draw things to a close. We might say that this is all good stuff. So many boxes have been ticked and given that Manoah and his wife seemingly are doing things so well.

Now, presumably their son, Samson, will be formed and molded into a godly and exemplary young man. Everything is set for that to happen.

That's the formula, isn't it? Exemplary parents produce exemplary children. Not so. Samson was, in a very real sense, a man of God.

He was certainly a man used by God, but he was also a bit of a disaster morally and spiritually.

What went wrong? What went wrong? Is this a case of bad parenting?

It all seems so good, but actually, is this to be explained by bad parenting? Some of us have been using Tim Keller's study guide and judges over these past months. And let me just say something that Keller says in the book that he's written, a commentary on judges.

[39 : 21] He concludes in this fashion, Samson's life story indicates that his parents fell quite short in their child rearing and failed to show and explain God's character to their son.

Now, this strikes me as somewhat unfair and unwarranted. We don't know that to be the case.

Bringing up children, as many of you know, is not an exact science. You can, we can, as believers, do the right thing in as much as fallible sinners ever can, and still find that a son or daughter goes off the tracks or abandons the faith, be it for a period or perhaps, as far as we know, with no evidence of ever returning.

Equally, there are believers who do a pretty poor job. And God, in his grace, grants them faithful and godly children. Now, I'm not saying, don't misunderstand me, I'm not saying it's a matter indifferent how we raise our children.

Far from it. The whole point of concentrating in this chapter in the manner that we have is because we think it is very important how we do so. But what I'm simply acknowledging from the example of Samson, that life is often more complicated than perhaps we would like it to be.

[40 : 42] Let me close by zooming out to just notice something of the big picture. I said that that wasn't our concern, and it hasn't been our principal concern. But let's just quickly, a snapshot of the big picture as we do zoom out.

But with such pious parents and with a man chosen by God from the womb, everything appears to be set up for a great deliverer and a great deliverance.

Surely Samson will be the one to surpass those who had gone before. Surely he will be the one to provide lasting and deep deliverance for God's people.

But as we'll discover, that was not what was to happen. God's people needed another deliverer. They needed a greater deliverer.

Samson, along with all his fellow judges, prepares the way and points in the direction of another, of the promised and perfect Messiah, the perfect Savior, the perfect Deliverer, our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

[41 : 49] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you that you are a God who helps us. We thank you that you respond as we seek your help. We need your help in so many matters.

Indeed, we need your help in everything. Sometimes we're too foolish or proud to acknowledge that that is so. And very particularly in this great responsibility that you've given us of passing on the faith to the next generation.

Be that as parents or as part of a congregation of God's people. And so we come and we acknowledge our need of help. And to you asking for help. And we pray that we would have the confidence and the faith to know that you are indeed the God who will grant us the help that we need.

And help us then. And help us in the matters that we've been thinking about. And in the characteristics of this family, of this marriage that we've identified. Help us with the help of your Spirit to apply these matters.

To our own behavior. To our own marriages. To our own parenting responsibilities. And all of these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.