

CoreGroup Guide | Shift Happens - Part 2

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A Note from Pastor Charity

As we ease into 2026, we are leaning into a few new rhythms to help us stay grounded and connected to Jesus in this new year:

- During each sermon series, we will highlight one of our Six Shared Practices. Our practice for this series is **Prayer**. Click on [this link](#) to review the Start, Grow, Stretch for Prayer, assess where you are right now, and choose a next step.
- You are invited to a new monthly gathering called **Prayers of the People**, a simple service of prayer, silence, and contemplation. Second Tuesday | 7:00pm | Clayton Site.
- This semester, each CoreGroup guide will include a **memory verse** that you can learn on your own or together with your group. To see the recommended verse for this series, scroll down to the *Going Deeper* section of this guide.

Thank you for continuing to show up and practice the way of Jesus together as a CoreGroup!

Welcome

Welcome to the second week of our sermon series called *Shift Happens: When Life Doesn't Go As Planned*. Today's discussion invites us to reflect on what happens when we are the reason life does not go as planned. We all make bad choices; we all make mistakes; we all have regrets. How do we find grace and redemption even in the face of failure?

Opening Prayer

Gracious and holy God, thank you for this group and for this opportunity to wrestle with the changes and challenges of life, together, in community. We welcome you into our conversation today. Guide us, strengthen us, push us, pull us, and surround us with your love. Amen.

Ice Breaker

What is the best (or worst!) hairstyle you've ever had? How did this hairstyle make you feel?

The Head

The story of Samson is complicated, to say the least. The account can be found in the Old Testament book of Judges, chapters 13-16. At the time of Samson's birth, the Israelites were engaged in yet another conflict with the Philistines, a group of foreigners who seemed to be their perpetual enemies. Just before Samson was born, Judges 13:1 states, "The Israelites did things that the Lord saw as evil and he handed them over to the Philistines for 40 years."

Samson eventually grew up to become the last of the major judges to lead the people of Israel. [Today we might think of these “judges” as military or civic leaders.] Samson had superhuman powers from God in the form of extreme strength. As it turns out, the secret of his strength came from being a [nazarite of God](#), which meant Samson never cut his hair. In fact, in Judges 16:17 Samson claimed, “If my head is shaved, my strength will leave me, and I’ll become weak.”

Today’s scripture picks up in the midst of Samson’s relationship with a Philistine woman named Delilah. Samson loved Delilah, but the rulers of the Philistines convinced her to seduce him in order for them to find a way to take away his powers. Eventually Delilah tricked Samson into sharing the secret of his hair and his super strength, and that is where our story begins today.

Judges 16:18-30

18 When Delilah realized that he had told her his whole secret, she sent word to the rulers of the Philistines, “Come one more time, for he has told me his whole secret.” The rulers of the Philistines came up to her and brought the silver with them.

19 She got him to fall asleep with his head on her lap. Then she called a man and had him shave off the seven braids of Samson’s hair. He began to weaken, and his strength left him. 20 She called out, “Samson, the Philistines are on you!”

He woke up from his sleep and thought, I’ll escape just like the other times and shake myself free. But he didn’t realize that the LORD had left him. 21 So the Philistines captured him, put out his eyes, and took him down to Gaza. They bound him with bronze chains, and he worked the grinding mill in the prison.

22 But the hair on his head began to grow again right after it had been shaved.

23 The rulers of the Philistines gathered together to make a great sacrifice to their god Dagon and to hold a celebration. They cheered, “Our god has handed us Samson our enemy!” 24 When the people saw him, they praised their god, for they said, “Our god has handed us our enemy, the very one who devastated our land and killed so many of our people.” 25 At the height of the celebration, they said, “Call for Samson so he can perform for us!” So they called Samson from the prison, and he performed in front of them. Then they had him stand between the pillars.

26 Samson said to the young man who led him by the hand, “Put me where I can feel the pillars that hold up the temple, so I can lean on them.” 27 Now the temple was filled with men and women. All the rulers of the Philistines were there, and about three thousand more men and women were on the roof watching as Samson performed. 28 Then Samson called out to the LORD, “LORD God, please remember me! Make me strong just this once more, God, so I can have revenge on the Philistines, just one act of revenge for my two eyes.” 29 Samson grabbed the two central pillars that held up the temple. He leaned against one with his right hand and the other with his left. 30 And Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines!” He strained with all his might, and the temple collapsed on the rulers and all the people who were in it. So it turned out that he killed more people in his death than he did during his life.

- What stands out to you about this scripture? What questions do you have? Review the key components of the story together with the group.
- List the apparent mistakes or missteps made by Samson in this story.

- In what ways does pride play a role in the arc of Samson's life?
- How does Samson redeem his poor decisions in the end? Or rather, how does God redeem Samson in spite of these poor decisions?

The Heart

Judges 16:20 says that Samson thought he could escape from his enemy just as he always had, but he didn't realize that the Lord had left him. Samson certainly did not expect to go from being Israel's champion to a prisoner of the Philistines. What a shift!

- The cutting of Samson's hair felt like a depletion of his strength, but do you think God actually left him? Describe a time in your life when it felt like God left you.
- We sometimes use the phrase "fall from grace" to describe a situation like Samson's. What does it feel like to fall from grace, or to witness someone else go through this? (NOTE: As Methodists we believe God's grace is always with us)
- How do these times impact our emotional, spiritual, and/or relational well-being?
- When you know you've messed up, how is your prayer life impacted?

The Hands

Samson's poor decisions, personal failures, pride, and regret were not the end of his story, and thankfully the same is true for us. When we are honest with ourselves, with others, and most importantly, with God, redemption is possible.

- Take a minute to examine the patterns of your life. Where are some potential pitfalls?
- What is one area where you may need to practice some humility during this season?
- In light of this week's discussion, how can your CoreGroup be praying for you?

Closing Prayer

All to Jesus I surrender,
All to him I freely give;
I will ever love and trust him,
In his presence daily live.

All to Jesus I surrender,
Make me, Savior, wholly Thine;
Let me feel Thy Holy Spirit,
Truly know that thou art mine.

All to Jesus I surrender,
Lord, I give myself to Thee;
Fill me with Thy love and power,
Let Thy blessing fall on me.

I surrender all; I surrender all;
All to thee, my blessed savior; I surrender all.

[I Surrender All](#), a hymn written by Judson W. Van DeVenter, 1896

Going Deeper

This semester, each CoreGroup guide will include a memory verse that you can learn on your own or together with your group. The recommended memory verse for the *Shift Happens* series is Isaiah 43:19 from the Common English Bible (CEB):

“Look! I’m doing a new thing; now it sprouts up; don’t you recognize it? I’m making a way in the desert, paths in the wilderness.”

Here are three simple ways to practice memorizing a verse:

1. **Write it** (one time a day on a notecard, in your notes app, or on your mirror).
2. **Say it out loud** (at the same time daily - driving, brushing teeth, before bed).
3. **Pray it** (turn the verse into a one sentence prayer for yourself or someone you love).