

Becoming a Nazirite

Passages: Num 6

Memory Verse

“Therefore ‘come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.’ ‘I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty.’ ” (2 Corinthians 6:17–18)

Knowledge of God’s Will [God’s Word]	Knowledge of God [God’s Divine Nature]	Good Works [Behavior]
1. Becoming a Nazirite means choosing to dedicate oneself to God. 2. To be a spiritual Nazirite, we must follow God’s will, not our own.	1. God is holy. 2. God is to be glorified above all others.	Be a spiritual Nazirite by dedicating our lives to God and separating ourselves from the fleeting pleasures of this world.

Overview

Events and Spiritual Teachings

- A. The Conditions of a Nazirite
- B. The Conclusion of a Nazirite’s Vows
- C. Nazirites in the Bible

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- 1. Abstain from Wine: Avoiding Worldly Pleasures
- 2. Uncut Hair: Reflecting God in Our Actions
- 3. Avoid Dead Bodies: Remaining Holy
- 4. A True Spiritual Nazirite

Memory Verse

Conclusion: God has separated us to Himself because He loves us and wants to give the best to us. His only requirement is that we separate ourselves from the world around us and avoid becoming entangled in its many pleasures.

Spiritual Teachings

A. The Conditions of a Nazirite (Num 6:1–7)

A Nazirite was separated to take up the service of God and could be from any tribe. The various rules that a Nazirite had to follow made it clear to others and to himself that he had been separated to serve the Lord. A Nazirite could be called by God, as in the case of Samson (Judg 13:5), be dedicated by a vow of service made by his parents, as in the case of Samuel (1 Sam 1:11), or make a vow himself, as in the case of Paul who consecrated himself for a time (Acts 18:18; 21:23–24).

1. Abstain from wine (vv. 1–4)

Wine was a common fruit product associated with celebration and feasts. Abstinence from wine therefore represented giving up the pleasures of this world to lead a simple life, free from excess and extravagance. A Nazirite should take his focus away from worldly pursuits and focus wholly on the work of God.

2. No razor shall touch his head (v. 5)

Even back then, haircuts were an essential aspect of one's outward appearance! A lack of trimming would have been a visible symbol of the Nazirite's focus on their inward, not outward, appearance. His inner, spiritual character became the focus. This also would have made him stand out, possibly even causing uncomfortable attention or embarrassment. But on the other hand, it was a chance for the Nazirite to share about his life of service to God. Head coverings were also a sign of respect, a concept reflected in a Nazirite's long hair.

3. No contact with dead bodies (vv. 6–7)

Since a Nazirite was to lead a holy life untainted by the things of the world, he needed to keep himself pure by avoiding defilement. If the deceased were a family member, tending to the needs and details associated with the funeral and burial would naturally involve close proximity with the dead body. Keeping a distance meant that they must avoid being entangled with the traditions and administrations of the world. Not being distracted by such worldly details would have also allowed the Nazirite to focus wholeheartedly on his service to God.

B. The Conclusion of a Nazirite's Vows (Num 6:13–21)

A Nazirite's dedication was so important that they also had to undergo several actions to announce the conclusion of their vow to God.

1. Offerings (vv. 13–17)

The offering of the sin, burnt, and peace offerings was a reminder that despite his special service to God, his acceptance was still based on God's forgiveness and blessings. Service to God is a divine privilege accepted by the will of God, not according to the will of man. No matter how much we offer to God, our acceptance, and even our salvation, is still based on God's mercy.

2. Shaving of the head (v. 18)

With the conclusion of his vow, the Nazirite was to shave off all his hair and burn it on the fire used for the peace offering. Burning all his hair was not only a physical sign of the conclusion of his vow. It was also a reminder not to hold on to any past achievements that may arouse pride in his heart. Burning it as an offering to God meant that all his service, no matter how great or small, was for God's glory, not his own. As workers of God, we should resume our "normal service" and not dwell on past works, or we might start to glorify ourselves. Instead, we should quietly go about our business, knowing that God will reward us for our good deeds in His own

time and way.

3. Whatever else his hand is able to provide (v. 21)

If there were any additional personal vows that the Nazirite had made, he wasn't to forget about them, but to continue to fulfill them. As spiritual Nazirites, apart from what we initially set out to offer to the Lord, we shouldn't place limitations or restrictions on whatever other good services we can render to the Lord. Since all we have has come from God, we should use the abilities He has given us to serve Him whenever an opportunity arises.

C. Nazirites in the Bible

1. Samson

One of the most well-known Nazirites in the Bible is Samson. He was an unusual case because the vow of a Nazirite was normally voluntary and temporary. Samson, however, was set aside by the Lord to be a Nazirite for his entire life (Judg 13:6–7). Even more unusual was that God commanded his mother to observe the same restrictions until his birth (vv. 13–14). Samson's case is also unusual in the unfortunate fact that he eventually broke all three requirements of a Nazirite.

2. Samuel

When Hannah, Samuel's mother, begged the Lord for a son, "she made a vow, and said, 'O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of my life, and no razor shall come upon his head'" (1 Sam 1:11). Like Samson, Samuel was unusual in that he was set aside to be a Nazirite his entire life, except this vow was placed upon him by his mother: if God gave her a son, she would give her son to God. In exchange for his very birth and life, which would not have occurred without God's intervention, Samuel would dedicate his life to serving the Lord. Unlike Samson, Samuel was a lifelong Nazirite who kept his vows and faithfully served God his entire life.

3. John the Baptist

When an angel of the Lord announced the impending birth of John the Baptist to Zacharias, he said that John "will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb" (Lk 1:15). Like Samson and Samuel, John was an unusual case in that he was a Nazirite for his entire life.

4. Paul

Paul took the Nazirite vow at least twice in his life. The Bible records Paul concluding his vow by cutting off his hair at Cenchrea before setting sail for Syria (Acts 18:18). Later, the Bible records that there were rumors that Paul had been teaching Jews to abandon the Mosaic laws. These rumors interfered with his ability to spread the gospel and shepherd the church (1 Tim 3:7). Paul had never taught the Jews to give up the Mosaic laws, only that Gentiles should not be forced to follow them. So, the apostles advised Paul to join some other brethren who had taken up the Nazirite vow. By following this Mosaic tradition, he would rebuff any reports that he had abandoned the laws (Acts 21:18–26).

As a Nazirite, Samson broke every rule. Yet, God still set Samson aside, used him for His purpose, and answered Samson's prayers. This teaches us that God may use us up to a point, but our own salvation is in jeopardy when our focus is not on God. We cannot let our own self-centered desires hinder His work.

Samuel, John the Baptist, and Paul gave up their own wills and followed God's instead. Whatever gifts God has given us, and however we serve Him, we must do our best to draw closer to God and focus on His will instead of our own desires. When we do so, we can become a true spiritual Nazirite, holy and set apart for God's purpose.

Check for Understanding

- 1. What were the three restrictions that a Nazirite followed?** (1) Abstain from wine; (2) Must not cut their hair; (3) No contact with dead bodies.
- 2. Explain the significance of each restriction.** (1) Abstinence from alcohol represented giving up the pleasures of this world; (2) A lack of trimming would have been a visible symbol of the Nazirite's focus on their inward, not outward, appearance; and (3) Not being distracted by worldly details would allow the Nazirite to focus wholeheartedly on his service to God.
- 3. How did a Nazirite conclude their vows?** By making offerings, shaving their hair, and fulfilling any additional personal vows they had made.
- 4. Who were the Nazirites studied in this lesson?** Samson, Samuel, John the Baptist, and Paul.
- 5. Why were the cases of Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist unusual?** The Nazirite vow was normally voluntary and temporary, but theirs was lifelong.

Life Application

A Spiritual Nazirite

"Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." (1 Cor 10:31)

We learned about the rules of being a Nazirite and studied the example of Samson, including the mistakes that he made. It is easy to point out another person's flaws while forgetting to look at our own. Samson's life teaches us that separating ourselves for service to God is not easy. Yet, God wants us to love Him wholeheartedly, to be His priests, and to learn how to be spiritual Nazirites. Considering the rules that we learned today, how can we become a spiritual Nazirite? We are now going to look at a case study as an example. As we go through each section, we'll discuss some questions and personal takeaways that we should reflect upon in our own lives.

1. Abstain from Wine: Avoiding Worldly Pleasures

"All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." (1 Cor 6:12)

Case Study, Part 1:

John was a talented soccer player. He loved playing soccer ever since he could walk. Every day, he arrived at school an hour early so that he could play before school started, during every break, and after school for hours on end. He was on the school team and played competitively on a regular basis. John believed that his talent was given by God, so it was clear that he would be a pro soccer player when he grew up. Besides, what better way was there to make a great living than doing the thing he loved best? However, to fulfill his dream, playing for the local school was not enough. He needed to join a group outside of school to get a chance to be scouted by a professional team. After joining a local group, he was soon practicing and playing six days a week. Match days were every Saturday, so he was no longer able to attend the whole day at church.

Discussion

- What would your advice to John be in terms of whether he should pursue his ambition of being a professional soccer player?
- Is taking up a professional sport a sin?

Since we are children of God, we need to be conscious of glorifying God every moment of our lives. There are things in this world that are contrary to the word of God, such as pride, sexual immorality, and hatred. But there are also things that are more “neutral,” such as hobbies, sports, or things we do to relax, such as eating out or going on vacation. However, whatever the activity, we need to ask ourselves: how much time do we spend on things that are not spiritually beneficial for us? If the answer is, “a lot,” do we enjoy the pleasures that this world offers more than finding pleasure in doing the will of God? As a spiritual Nazirite, how can we learn to distinguish and be wary of the distractions of this world?

2. Uncut Hair: Reflecting God in Our Actions

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.” (Mt 5:13)

Case Study, Part 2:

After a few months, John realized that in the long term, he would have to give up going to church entirely. He knew that he was already failing to keep the Sabbath properly, and if he became a professional, there would be no time for church at all. Needless to say, he was already receiving a lot of pressure from church members for playing soccer on the Sabbath day, and he was reminded repeatedly not to focus on fame or riches. For John, neither of these were his prime motivation in playing the sport. He relished the challenge of playing against the best and the joy of playing the sport itself.

He began to ask himself, “Could it be pride? For wanting to show off my talent? But I truly enjoy playing this sport, and the Bible tells us to be joyful. If I can find a life in which I find joy, and at the same time bring others joy in the same sport by playing a good game, is that such a bad thing? But on the other hand, true joy comes from God...” And that was the end of his internal struggle. The true question was, would he find greater joy in playing a professional sport, or in God Himself? Realizing this, John knew that he could not prevail against the truth, as the debate all boiled down to whether he truly believed in God.

John knew if he truly believed in God, he also needed to trust that his joy would not diminish if he chose to give up his dream. He concluded that it was simply not possible to be a professional player and to love God at the same time. He made the right choice in the end and began to play less. This meant that he now had more time to spend on his schoolwork, his family, and church activities. He also realized that while striving to be a pro player, he had spent no time with his brothers and sisters in church. Now, he got to know them better and began to experience the joy of fellowship with them.

Discussion

- If someone you knew was too busy for God because they were working towards a dream or goal, what would you say to them?
- What kind of argument might they respond with, and how would you respond?

It’s not a sin to enjoy something or to be good at it. It is also easy to argue that to be good at anything, time and dedication is a requirement, and that in our later years, most of one’s life is devoted to their work anyway. But for John, soccer was clearly taking up almost all his daily life. Aiming to be a pro athlete directly contradicted his faith, since he would have to give up the Sabbath day.

When a hobby changes from an occasional pastime into something that consumes a large part of our everyday life, we need to consider its impact on our other responsibilities and our relationship with God. It is human nature to spend time on various activities for pleasure, fulfillment, and joy. As Christians, we may find that when we do not find spiritual joy in God, we easily fall into various temptations and addictions. We begin moving from one worldly obsession to another. However, when our relationship with God is good, we will find ourselves living a far more balanced life. The question is, at what point do our lives tip towards an “imbalance”? Let’s continue with part three of our case study.

3. Avoid Dead Bodies: Remaining Holy

“But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.” (Jas 1:14–15)

Case Study, Part 3:

By now, John had come to terms with the fact that he was not going to be a professional athlete. However, this did not mean he was no longer an avid fan. He played on occasion and still followed his favorite team. He didn’t watch as much as he used to, but still set time aside to watch big matches. One such occasion was a game that concluded during lunchtime on a Saturday. “Perfect,” he thought to himself. “I can dash out to the bar across the road and catch some of the game before returning for afternoon service.” To his surprise and disappointment, his team lost – and unjustly, in his eyes – which put him in a sour mood when returning to church. The loss was just a reminder that he should not have left church to watch the game, even if during break time. From then on, he no longer watched any soccer on Saturdays.

Sometime later, smartphones became popular, and John had acquired one for himself. Its convenience was irresistible. But he soon discovered a problem: he found himself switching from his Bible app to his soccer app the moment the final prayer of Sabbath day had concluded. His phone made it all too convenient for him to catch up on any games he had missed. Where before he was limited to a TV with a proper subscription, or in absence of that, tuning in to a radio commentary in his car, now he could watch his favorite game anywhere. Soccer was everywhere he was, anytime he wanted.

Discussion

- What can we learn about John’s love of soccer from what has been described so far?
- Why did John find it difficult to get away from soccer, even on the Sabbath day?

When we find ourselves unable to say “no” at any given time to the entertainment of this world, we have allowed ourselves to come under its power. This leaves us vulnerable to temptation and gives the devil great advantage over us. If we sense even a hint of addiction to anything this world has to offer, we need to take urgent action to eliminate whatever has begun to take over our lives. But how does one go about doing this? Let’s continue with the final part of our case study.

4. A True Spiritual Nazirite

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” (Mt 6:24)

Case Study, Part 4:

John once heard a teaching: “There’s nothing wrong with watching sports, but if we can’t control when we watch, and the sport is instead controlling us, then we have a problem.” John knew that although he

had already taken steps to control his love of soccer, there was an underlying issue that was affecting his self-control. He considered whether he should just stop using a smartphone altogether and whether that would help, but concluded that it would not, since the root of the issue stemmed from his mindset. He now understood the fundamental problem: his love for God was not above all other things. If he truly believed in God and loved God with all His heart, then he would be able to say no to things that could affect his relationship with God, including his soccer-watching habits.

Discussion:

- Based on John’s case study, what are some steps to becoming a true spiritual Nazirite? *(Teachers: Try listing out cohesive steps based on the students’ response. Example: identifying things that take our time away from God; working out a plan to move away from these things; finding someone to help us be accountable; working on our relationship with God through fellowship, church activities, etc.)*

John clearly understood what was pleasing to God, and even took some steps in the right direction. But ironically, having a smartphone revealed to him that his heart was not as faithful to God as he thought. The device itself was not the problem, but it helped reveal to him that he needed to go back to the fundamentals in his faith and fix his relationship with God.

Today, there are an endless number of things in this world that seek to grab our attention. John’s love of soccer is a good representation of anything that can reduce the time that we should be spending with God. But when it comes to living a life that is pleasing to God, we might now realize that it is not an easy process. Reducing our time or abstaining from things that we enjoy is very difficult. Even when we do adjust, we may find more and more obstacles between us and God. Giving up our worldly hobbies and habits relies both on our desire to know God and on the strength of the Holy Spirit.

It may seem like too much effort, or even unfair that we need to give up the things we like. But as spiritual Nazirites, we ought to understand that it is a joy and a rare privilege to be chosen by God. And in exchange for our faith, God has promised us “an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet 1:4–5).

Memory Verse

“Therefore ‘come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.’ ‘I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty.’ ” (2 Corinthians 6:17–18)

Meaning

God has called us to be separate from the unclean things of the world, so that we can enjoy the privilege of being His children and receive all the blessings that He has intended for us.

Conclusion

As spiritual Nazirites, God has separated us to Himself because He loves us and wants to give the best to us. His only requirement is that we separate ourselves from the world around us and avoid becoming entangled in its many pleasures. When we strive to be holy and to seek out what God wants instead of what we want, then He will bless us and reward us with treasures in heaven.

Lesson 3 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. What has God promised us if we remain separate from the world?
We can enjoy the privilege of being His children and receive all the blessings that He has intended for us.
2. “He shall _____ himself from _____ and similar drink; he shall drink neither vinegar made from _____ nor vinegar made from similar drink; neither shall he drink any grape juice, nor eat fresh grapes or raisins.” (Numbers 6:3)
separate, wine, wine
3. Explain the teachings that we can learn from the three vows of a Nazirite.
See Spiritual Teachings, Section A.
4. What in your life can you “abstain” from to improve your relationship with God?
Personal answers.
5. What things can we do less of to make more time for our spiritual cultivation?
Personal answers.