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DEBORAH: ENCOURAGING FAITH



Who do you know that's good at influencing others?

QUESTION #1

THE POINT

Use your influence for God's kingdom and for His honor.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

“Someone sees leadership potential in you that you don’t see in yourself.”

That was the best thing I could tell my daughter when she called home during her sophomore year of college. And I knew it from experience. During my own college years, I learned a lot about leadership. Being president of the women’s glee club and editor of the yearbook were just two things God used in my life to shape future leadership endeavors.

And now my own daughter needed to experience what others saw in her. She had been chosen to serve on a school leadership team. It was an honor to be asked, but she was hesitant about assuming more responsibilities. Others saw leadership potential in her, though, and they encouraged her to use it. I did too.

In the Book of Judges we find a woman who also encouraged others in leadership. God used Deborah to challenge and encourage Barak to step up and lead. Her example and faith led to a great moment in the life of Israel.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Judges 4:1-5

¹ Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, now that Ehud was dead. ² So the LORD sold them into the hands of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. Sisera, the commander of his army, was based in Harosheth Haggoyim. ³ Because he had nine hundred chariots fitted with iron and had cruelly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years, they cried to the LORD for help. ⁴ Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. ⁵ She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided.

It's easy to breeze past the names in these verses, but if we do we miss some important background information that helps us understand the circumstances and events. It's like watching a *Star Wars* movie and not reading the opening lines that scroll across the screen. Consider the names introduced here:

- ▶ **Ehud.** Ehud was a left-handed judge from the tribe of Benjamin who led Israel during the eighteen years of oppression under Eglon, king of Moab (Judg. 3:14-30). As a leftie myself, I find it fascinating how he had a military advantage because he could conceal his sword on the right side where it was unexpected. The mention of his death is significant, because we see Israel falling back into a cycle of sin, evil, and oppression.
- ▶ **King Jabin.** Because of their unfaithfulness, God allowed the Israelites to fall under the rule of the oppressive King Jabin of Canaan. Those who lived in the northern part of the kingdom were especially impacted. Some scholars believe Jabin wasn't a personal name, but a royal name; in other words, this particular king was part of the Jabin dynasty.

What are your initial observations about Deborah?

QUESTION #2

- ▶ **Sisera.** Sisera was the commander of Jabin's army.
- ▶ **Deborah.** Deborah was the only female judge mentioned in the Book of Judges; men traditionally held this leadership role. And as we'll see in Judges 5, she also had a knack for poetry and music.

God calls each of us, and He gives every believer the ability to influence others for His work. God calls us all in three ways.

1. **The call to salvation.** God calls us to follow Christ into a personal relationship with Him. He calls us through the work of the Holy Spirit. It is a call for all people.
2. **The call to serve and minister to others.** As Christ-followers, we are called to walk in humility, gentleness, patience, and bearing each other's burdens with love.
3. **The call to a specific ministry assignment.** This call doesn't just apply to those in full-time vocational ministry; it also applies to those who serve as volunteers. The point is that we are to use the gifts God has given us to serve.

Judges 4:6-9

⁶ She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, "The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you: 'Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead them up to Mount Tabor. ⁷ I will lead Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.'" ⁸ Barak said to her, "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go." ⁹ "Certainly I will go with you," said Deborah. "But because of the course you are taking, the honor will not be yours, for the LORD will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman." So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh.

We often tease that behind every good man is a great woman, and that seems to be the case with Barak when Deborah ordered him to deploy the troops. We discover a fearful commander who was not quite sure of his own assignment to go after the evil Sisera, but Deborah encouraged Barak to face their enemy.

Barak could do so confidently because it was a God-given task. Deborah could call Barak to act decisively because of her own trust in God. We see her confidence in the specific instructions she gave to Barak.

- ▶ **A specific place:** “Lead them up to Mount Tabor” (v. 6).
- ▶ **A specific number:** “Take with you ten thousand men” (v. 6).
- ▶ **A specific outcome:** “I will . . . give him into your hands” (v. 7).

Deborah obviously knew how to work with men—give them the highlights and the bullet points without the fluff. Make no mistake: she was living out her own calling, but she also found a way to elevate Barak and encourage him to face his lack of faith.

My husband and son once joined a hiking trip with some other men and their sons. They were determined to reach the top of Mount Elbert, the tallest peak in Colorado. When one person was ready to give up, another stepped in to push that individual forward.

All of us need friends who inspire us to move forward in faith when obstacles and doubts rise up to block our way. You might be like Barak who needed Deborah’s presence and direction to move forward.

Deborah didn’t abandon Barak. She “gladly” (CSB) went with him and gave him strength to accomplish God’s purpose, but not without one final prophetic word. The honor of the battle, she forewarned, would belong to a woman. At this point, we might assume that this honor would go to Deborah, but instead, it would go to a nomadic Gentile tent-dweller named Jael (Judg. 4:17).

God often uses the most unlikely of people to fulfill His ultimate plan and purposes.

When has God used someone else to encourage you to step into a ministry opportunity?

QUESTION #3



Judges 5:1-5

¹ On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang this song: ²“When the princes in Israel take the lead, when the people willingly offer themselves—praise the LORD! ³“Hear this, you kings! Listen, you rulers! I, even I, will sing to the LORD; I will praise the LORD, the God of Israel, in song. ⁴“When you, LORD, went out from Seir, when you marched from the land of Edom, the earth shook, the heavens poured, the clouds poured down water. ⁵ The mountains quaked before the LORD, the One of Sinai, before the LORD, the God of Israel!”

Deborah and Barak found themselves praising God for victory. This unlikely duo went from being the “odd” couple in chapter 4 to the “awed” couple in chapter 5, which is a poetic parallel to the events found in chapter 4.¹ Songs of praise often follow when we reflect on events.

The event that triggered their praise was their victory over the armies of Jabin. We see the success of the Israelite army as the Canaanite's great and mighty general, Sisera, fled and hid, cowering, in the tent of a woman named Jael. The writer of Judges graphically described how Jael killed Sisera by hammering a tent peg through his temple as he slept in her tent (Judg. 4:15-22).

Israel continued to succeed with the Lord's help. “On that day God subdued Jabin king of Canaan before the Israelites. And the hand of the Israelites pressed harder and harder against Jabin king of Canaan until they destroyed him” (vv. 23-24).

We read in Judges 5:2 that God is blessed when godly leaders lead and people freely and willingly step up to be used by God. God was praised as the creator of everything and His purposes will not be overcome. The Israelites were victorious over the Canaanites, who were known for worshiping Baal, the god of the storm. But when “the LORD, the God of Israel” stepped in, “The earth shook, the heavens poured, the clouds poured down water. The mountains quaked before the LORD.” Clearly, the false god of the storm was no match for the Lord of the universe.

In what ways can we be an influence for God in the places where we live, work, attend school, or volunteer?

QUESTION #4

How can our group use our influence to further God's kingdom?

QUESTION #5

INFLUENCING OTHERS

*Choose the image of a person influencing others that most inspires you.
Then answer the questions.*



List a few people who are in your sphere of influence and some practical ways that you can help them on their path to follow Christ.

Write a brief prayer to God, asking Him for wisdom and courage in your call to help others follow Him.

LIVE IT OUT

There are many ways we can use our influence for the Lord. Choose one of the following applications:

- ▶ **Thank someone.** Send a note of thanks to someone who has been an influence in your life. Encourage the encourager!
- ▶ **Praise.** Follow the example of Judges 5. Look at how God has worked in your life and praise Him. Use time in your car as a time for listening to praise music. Make your commute one of praise and worship.
- ▶ **Embrace the call.** Consider how God may be calling you to lead in a specific ministry assignment. Find a godly person to counsel you. Or be that person, the one who encourages someone else to embrace God's call in his or her life.



My daughter stepped up to her new role as a leader—and she is still leading. A little encouragement is all it took, and now she is encouraging others. God can use you to influence others as well and to give Him praise.

My thoughts

¹ W. Gary Philips, *Holman Old Testament Commentary: Judges, Ruth* (B&H, 2004), Judges 4–5.