



WHERE LIFE & PURPOSE CONNECT

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of July 23, 2023

Weekly Prayer

God, you are worthy of our celebration and praise. You are a God who moves mountains and yet also uses us to create community and do your deeds in the world. May our time in prayer and study prepare us to rise to the situations in front of us so we can meet them with leadership, wisdom, and love. Amen.

Monday, July 24

Scripture: Judges 2:16-19

Then the LORD raised up leaders to rescue them from the power of these raiders. But they wouldn't even obey their own leaders because they were unfaithful, following other gods and worshipping them. They quickly deviated from the way of their ancestors, who had obeyed the LORD's commands, and didn't follow their example. The LORD was moved by Israel's groaning under those who oppressed and crushed them. So the LORD would raise up leaders for them, and the LORD would be with the leader, and he would rescue Israel from the power of their enemies as long as that leader lived. But then when the leader died, they would once again act in ways that weren't as good as their ancestors', going after other gods, to serve them and to worship them. They wouldn't drop their bad practices or hardheaded ways.

Observation

Today, we are backing up a few chapters - in verses that set the tone of what is to come. In verse 16, we're told God raised up leaders to rescue the people. While the people struggled in direction and obedience, God was faithful. God continued to bring leaders to them, even while the people strayed.

Application

These verses remind me of two things: (1) God's faithfulness and (2) humanity's incredible ability to misstep and forgive. These two seem to live together in rotation; God will always be faithful in bringing us leaders, directions, and a way forward - even when we forget or misstep time and again. Reflecting on your own life: Where has God provided you direction as you strayed? Who have been leaders that have guided you to live in the way of God?

Prayer

Faithful God, thank you for your enduring presence and never-ending love and care. Help me to follow you, and to seek leaders who embody your goodness and grace. Forgive me, dear God, when I misstep and stray. Help me find my way back to you. Amen.

Tuesday, July 25

Scripture: Judges 4:1-10

After Ehud had died, the Israelites again did things that the LORD saw as evil. So the LORD gave them over to King Jabin of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, and he was stationed in Harosheth-ha-goiim. The Israelites cried out to the LORD because Sisera had nine hundred iron chariots and had oppressed the Israelites cruelly for twenty years. Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was a leader of Israel at that time. She would sit under Deborah's palm tree between Ramah and Bethel in the Ephraim highlands, and the Israelites would come to her to settle disputes. She sent word to Barak, Abinoam's son, from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, "Hasn't the LORD, Israel's God, issued you a command? 'Go and assemble at Mount Tabor, taking ten thousand men from the people of Naphtali and Zebulun with you. I'll lure Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, to assemble with his chariots and troops against you at the Kishon River, and then I'll help you overpower him.'" Barak replied to her, "If you'll go with me, I'll go; but if not, I won't go." Deborah answered, "I'll definitely go with you. However, the path you're taking won't bring honor to you, because the LORD will hand over Sisera to a woman." Then Deborah got up and went with Barak to Kedesh. He summoned Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh, and ten thousand men marched out behind him. Deborah marched out with him too.

Observation

We're introduced to the prophet and judge Deborah here. She is one of just five women named as a prophet in the Old Testament. She is a charismatic leader who is leading during a turbulent time. While most of us are likely unfamiliar with the book of Judges, I think it's easy to see Deborah's courage and strength as a leader. She has seen where God is guiding them, names a leader in Barak, and is prepared to march with them.

Application

What has God called you to do that required bravery and strength? Deborah, like many prophets and leaders in scripture, is an unlikely candidate for the job. And yet, she trusted God's faithfulness to be present to her, equip her, and guide her to lead. Similarly, God is present to you, guiding and equipping you to the places you are called. How might you muster the courage of Deborah today?

Prayer

God, give me courage today. Help me to hear your voice clearly, and trust that you are with me. Amen.

Wednesday, July 26

Scripture: Judges 4:11-23

Now Heber the Kenite had moved away from the other Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, Moses' father-in-law, and had settled as far away as Elon-bezaananim, which is near Kedesh.

When it was reported to Sisera that Barak, Abinoam's son, had marched up to Mount Tabor, Sisera summoned all of his nine hundred iron chariots and all of the soldiers who were with him from Harosheth-ha-goiim to the Kishon River. Then Deborah said to Barak, "Get up! This is the day that the LORD has handed Sisera over to you. Hasn't the LORD gone out before you?" So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men behind him. The LORD threw Sisera and all the chariots and army into a panic^[a] before Barak; Sisera himself got down from his chariot and fled on foot. Barak pursued the chariots and the army all the way back to Harosheth-ha-goiim, killing Sisera's entire army with the sword. No one survived. Meanwhile, Sisera had fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because there was peace between Hazor's King Jabin and the family of Heber the Kenite. Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, "Come in, sir, come in here. Don't be afraid." So he went with her into the tent, and she hid him under a blanket. Sisera said to her, "Please give me a little water to drink. I'm thirsty." So she opened a jug of milk, gave him a drink, and hid him again. Then he said to her, "Stand at the entrance to the tent. That way, if someone comes and asks you, 'Is there a man here?' you can say, 'No.'" But Jael, Heber's wife, picked up a tent stake and a hammer. While Sisera was sound asleep from exhaustion, she tiptoed to him. She drove the stake through his head and down into the ground, and he died. Just then, Barak arrived after chasing Sisera. Jael went out to meet him and said, "Come and I'll show you the man you're after." So he went in with her, and there was Sisera, lying dead, with the stake through his head. So on that day God brought down Canaan's King Jabin before the Israelites.

Observation

We see the climactic ending of Deborah's leadership here - "on that day, God brought down Canaan's King before the Israelites" (v23). One thing I noticed, (and likely you did, too) is that Deborah worked with many others. With Barak and ten thousand men they defeated Sisera. Then, when we think he might have escaped, Jael (another fierce women not well-known) completed the task, by hammering a stake through his head.

Application

God has called all of us to live in faithful service. Some of us are called as leaders. Some of us are called for short periods of time. Most of us are called unexpectedly. All of us are called to work with others. Who are the people whom God has brought into your life, to serve alongside? How do your gifts complement and balance one another? Celebrate these relationships today!

Prayer

God of life, you have made us in relationship with others. Thank you for the gift of family, friends, and colleagues with whom I share my life. Help me find ways to celebrate and honor them today. Amen.

Thursday, July 27

Scripture: Judges 5:1-9

At that time, Deborah and Barak, Abinoam's son, sang:

When hair is long in Israel,

 when people willingly offer themselves—bless the LORD!

Hear, kings!

 Listen, rulers!

I, to the LORD,

 I will sing.

I will make music to the LORD,

 Israel's God.

LORD, when you set out from Seir,

 when you marched out from Edom's fields, the land shook,

 the sky poured down,

 the clouds poured down water.

The mountains quaked

 before the LORD, the one from Sinai,

 before the LORD, the God of Israel.

In the days of Shamgar, Anath's son,

 in the days of Jael, caravans ceased.

Those traveling by road

 kept to the backroads.

Villagers disappeared;

 they disappeared in Israel,

 until you, Deborah, arose,

 until you arose as a mother in Israel.

When they chose new gods,

 then war came to the city gates.

Yet there wasn't a shield or spear to be seen

 among forty thousand in Israel!

My heart is with Israel's commanders,

 who willingly offered themselves among the people—bless the LORD!

Observation

In these verses, Deborah (a judge & prophet) and Barak (a military commander) sing a song of praise to God. You can hear their willingness to offer themselves for others, along with their gratitude that others have come together to rally for their cause. They sing of God's faithfulness in their lives, calling and equipping them to service.

Application

What would your song of praise to God sound like, if you wrote one reflecting your life? Can you see a common thread throughout your life, connecting ways that God has called you to service? Where do you see God's faithfulness through the joys and challenges of your life?

Prayer

Saving God, we celebrate the ways you are active in our lives. We celebrate the ways you use us to make a difference. May we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving to ministry that creates partnership and builds community. Amen.

Friday, July 28

Scripture: Judges 5:10-18

You who ride white donkeys,
 who sit on saddle blankets,
 who walk along the road: tell of it.
To the sound of instruments at the watering places,
 there they repeat the LORD's victories,
 his villagers' victories in Israel.
Then the LORD's people marched down to the city gates.
 "Wake up, wake up, Deborah!
 Wake up, wake up, sing a song!
Arise, Barak!
 Capture your prisoners,
 Abinoam's son!"
Then those who remained marched down against royalty;
 the LORD's people marched down against warriors.
From Ephraim they set out into the valley,
 after you, Benjamin, with your people!
From Machir commanders marched down,
 and from Zebulun those carrying the official's staff.
The leaders of Issachar came along with Deborah;
 Issachar was attached to Barak,
 and was sent into the valley behind him.
Among the clans of Reuben
 there was deep soul-searching.
"Why did you stay back among the sheep pens,
 listening to the music for the flocks?"
For the clans of Reuben
 there was deep soul-searching.
Gilead stayed on the other side of the Jordan,
 and Dan, why did he remain with the ships?

Asher stayed by the seacoast,
camping at his harbors.
Zebulun is a people that readily risked death;
Naphtali too in the high countryside.

Observation

The song of Deborah and Barak continues today, praising God while recounting the battle they had just completed. Here, we notice the sounds of their community - the ones that come to support Deborah and Barak in their work. Nothing that God calls us to is done in isolation. In our command to love God and love neighbor, we *must* work with others.

Application

Earlier this week, we uplifted the community that surrounds us. Today, I wonder: who are the leaders who help guide you? How have they taught you to follow God well? How do you sing songs of support to them, especially in troubled times?

Prayer

God, thank you for leaders who teach and encourage. Thank you for the people in my life who have supported me. And for those who have been trailblazers, who have “fought the good fight” so that I might experience something new. Continue to raise up leaders and prophets who guide us in following you. Amen.

Saturday, July 29

Scripture: Judges 5:19-31

Kings came and made war;
the kings of Canaan fought
at Taanach by Megiddo's waters,
but they captured no spoils of silver.
The stars fought from the sky;
from their orbits they fought against Sisera.
The Kishon River swept them away;
the advancing river, the Kishon River.
March on, my life, with might!
Then the horses' hooves pounded
with the galloping, galloping of their stallions.
“Curse Meroz,” says the LORD's messenger,
“curse its inhabitants bitterly,
because they didn't come to the LORD's aid,
to the LORD's aid against the warriors.”
May Jael be blessed above all women;
may the wife of Heber the Kenite
be blessed above all tent-dwelling women.
He asked for water, and she provided milk;

she presented him cream in a majestic bowl.
She reached out her hand for the stake,
her strong hand for the worker's hammer.
She struck Sisera;
she crushed his head;
she shattered and pierced his skull.
At her feet he sank, fell, and lay flat;
at her feet he sank, he fell;
where he sank, there he fell—dead.
Through the window she watched,
Sisera's mother looked longingly through the lattice.
"Why is his chariot taking so long to come?
Why are the hoofbeats of his chariot horses delayed?"
Her wisest attendants answer;
indeed, she replies to herself:
"Wouldn't they be finding and dividing the loot?
A girl or two for each warrior;
loot of colored cloths for Sisera;
loot of colored, embroidered cloths;
two colored, embroidered cloths
as loot for every neck."
May all your enemies perish like this, LORD!
But may your allies be like the sun, rising in its strength.

Observation

Their song, and this chapter, close today. Here we read again of Jael who showed quiet courage and helped save Israel from Sisera. Her story reminds us that (1) sometimes God calls us to act in brave ways that are also quiet or secluded from the crowd, and (2) that sometimes following God is bigger than following the rules. Her hand was the one which brought death to Sisera and completed the work of Deborah and Barak. But doing so also betrayed cultural norms and laws. Still, she said yes to God and helped protect God's people.

Application

Jael's story is one that gives confidence to many people; a Google search will show you many images of artists depicting her bravery. Most of us will not find us following God by using a tent spike. But all of us will be challenged at some point in *how* we follow. Do we dare follow God if it means going against a cultural law? An unspoken rule? The "way it's always been"? Can we trust God to guide us, even in uncharted territory?

Prayer

God, you have called me to places in which I cannot see the ending. Give me courage to follow you, even if it is scary. Help me trust that you are with me now and always. Amen.