

Time of Grace Ministry
That's Messed Up: Not Just a Boys' Club
Judges 4
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This is amazing - some people think the Bible is an oppressive book to women. But if you look at the way women have been treated throughout history and you actually read the Bible, you will find so many examples of God being so proud of his daughters.

If I told you that today's message was about God and gender, about being male and about being female, about the way brothers and sisters in the faith treat each other and work together in the church, I wonder what kind of thoughts you would start to think? Because I've been thinking about God and gender for the past few weeks and I've had a lot of thoughts that I've been thinking about.

That is why I rewrote this message six different times and why I actually emailed it to two men and two women that I trust and why they gave me four different opinions when they replied to the email. I felt so stuck that I realized today that maybe the best thing that I could do is take you back to the part of the Bible that started me thinking; a part of the Bible in the Old Testament in the book of Judges that makes us wrestle with what it means to be a man and a woman who's following God. A story that comes from kind of a messed up section of the Bible but it's a magnificent example for you women and for us men to follow God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. So today, I want to open the Scriptures and I want to introduce you to two incredibly capable and faithful women who remind capable and strong men to be amazing followers of God.

Verse one says, "Again, the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord." That means they committed idolatry and they didn't care again. Now Ehud, the judge, was dead. "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. Because he had 900 chariots fitted with iron and had cruelly oppressed the Israelites for 20 years, they cried to the Lord for help."

So the story starts way north in Israel near the Sea of Galilee with a king named Jabin and his cruel general named Sisera. Now Sisera, despite his name, was not a sissy. He was a monster of a man and he got away with it because he had 900 iron chariots and Israel couldn't stop them. They were like the outnumbered Jews in the streets of Berlin as the Nazis marched through. All they could do was cry to God for help. Not the fake gods they used to cry out to but the real God of heaven and that's why verse three says, "They cried to the Lord for help." And because God is incredibly merciful to messed up people, he did help. In fact, he helped them through a woman. Look at the next verse; verse four: "Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. 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." Wow. She is strong. I mean, how could you ladies not read that verse and be inspired? This is what - 1200, 1300 B.C. when women were weak and uneducated and nothing and second class in eyes

of most and yet, here's Deborah. In the Hebrew language, the name Deborah literally means "bee." Like she was the original queen bee, right? She would sting people with the message of God. She had her own tree, the Palm of Deborah, and she was leading. It says she was "holding court," she was, "deciding disputes." And in case you didn't catch it, she was a woman. In fact, our English translations actually leave out a verse that's in the original Hebrew. In the Hebrew of verse four, it says, "Now Deborah, a woman, a prophet," because the original author wanted you to know this wasn't just any person who was leading and deciding and being godly and strong; this was a woman. And so people would come to her and she would speak the word of God boldly and it turns out that's exactly what the people needed.

Let's continue in verse six: "She," Deborah, "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 10,000 men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead them up to Mount Tabor. 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.' Barak said to her, 'If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go.'" See, Barak is afraid. And I think I know why; I think because Barak - like so many men who are listening to my voice - are numbers men. I know that's stereotypical, it's not always true, but so many men are addicted to the stats, to the numbers, and Barak was crunching the numbers in his head. "Okay, 900 chariots, 25 foot soldiers per chariot, that's 22,500 men. Then all the foot soldiers - how many do we have here? A few thousand? Ten thousand max? No, no, no." And he's terrified. And you can't blame him because this isn't an exhibition fight. If he loses to Sisera, it's his daughter, it's his niece, it's his younger sister, it's his wife that would become the next "womb or two" for Sisera to take advantage of. And so he sits there trembling, oppressed, and enslaved. He doesn't do anything but Deborah's different. It seems to me that Deborah wasn't into the numbers; she instead was into the name. The name of God. And she knew that the name of her God, the Lord of heaven and earth, was greater than any chariot, any army. This was God. The God of creation. The God of the Red Sea. The God of the exodus. The God who once trounced Pharaoh's chariot army without a single sword or soldier. She knew the name of that God and so she said to Barak, "Go in the name of God, in the strength of God. Lead the people!" And what does Barak say? "If you go - but I'm not going to lead." Sadly, Israel was so spiritually bankrupt at that time, there was not a single man who would step forward in the name of God and lead his people.

So look what happens next, verse nine: "Certainly, I will go with you,' said Deborah, 'but because of the course you're 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. There Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali and 10,000 men went under his command. Deborah also went up with him." So we're getting closer to the battle; the epic showdown between Barak and Deborah on one hand and Jabin and Sisera on the other and the most incredible verse comes next. Check out verse eleven. It says, "Now Heber the Kenite had left the other Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, Moses' brother-in-law, and pitched his tent by the great tree in Zaanannim near Kedesh. When they told Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, Sisera summoned from Harosheth Haggoyim to the Kishon River all his men and his 900 chariots fitted with iron. Then Deborah said to Barak, "Go! This is the day the Lord has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the lord gone ahead of you?' So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with 10,000 men following him. At Barak's advance, the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and

army by the sword and Sisera got down from his chariot and fled on foot. Barak pursued the chariots and army as far as Harosheth Haggoyim and all of Sisera's troops fell by the sword; not a man was left." That's awesome. Read the rest of Judges 5 and you find out the incredible thing that happened. Barak had the high ground on Mount Tabor, which is like this bump on the flat plains of northern Israel but Deborah told him to march in right into the flat hard plains where all the chariots were waiting because God was about to show up. It seems it was the summer season when Baal, the rain god, took a summer vacation so this river, the Kishon River, was just a little trickle; perfect for Sisera's chariot army. But Judges 5 says that God slapped the rain god in the face and he made it rain. The clouds bursted, the Kishon River overflowed its banks, and all 900 iron chariots get stuck in the mud. The Canaanite army panics. Barak finds his courage and they drop the army, they route them. In fact, it says specifically the "Lord routed Sisera by the end of Barak's sword." All the numbers didn't matter because the name of God showed up. He won an incredible victory through the faithfulness of his people and through the mighty power of his right hand.

The story ends like this: "Sisera, meanwhile, fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because there was an alliance between Jabin king of Hazor and the family of Heber the Kenite. Jael went to meet Sisera and said to him, 'Come, my lord, come right in. Don't be afraid.' So he entered her tent and she covered him with a blanket. 'I'm thirsty,' he said. 'Please, give me some water.' She opened a skin of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him up. 'Stand in the doorway of the tent,' he told her. 'If someone comes by and asks you, 'Is anyone in there?' say, 'No.' But Jael, Heber's wife, picked up a tent peg and a hammer and went quietly to him while he lay fast asleep, exhausted. She drove the peg through his temple into the ground and he died. Just then, Barak came by in pursuit of Sisera and Jael went out to meet him. 'Come,' she said. 'I'll show you the man you're looking for.' So he went in with her and there lay Sisera with a tent peg through his temple - dead."

So what does this story teach us today? Well, out of the many things and the many directions that we could take it, it's the first fill in the blank that I want you to think about today. This story teaches us that there's a good God-given tension between capable women and called men. I mean, it's just shocking to read Deborah's story. She's intelligent, she loves God, she knows the Scriptures, she is full of wisdom. People come to her for decisions and it's not unofficial; she's a prophetess, she is holding court. She is leading Israel. And then there's Jael, who in her quiet way, is ridiculously courageous and brave. It's amazing. Some people think the Bible is an oppressive book to women but if you look at the way women have been treated throughout history and you actually read the Bible, you'll find so many examples of God being so proud of his daughters. In the beginning, God made Adam and Eve, male and female, and he gave Eve the title "helper;" a title that is almost exclusively used in the Bible for God. We meet Miriam, Moses and Aaron's sister in the book of Exodus, and she's leading worship and prays in this beautiful song to celebrate God's victory. We see Huldah, the prophetess in 2 Kings, who's guiding and teaching King Josiah, one of the best kings in Israel's history. We get to the New Testament and there's Mary, who unlike older Zechariah who questions God when she - when God says to her, "You're going to be the mother of the Savior," even though a virgin, she says, "May the Lord be to me as you said." There's Anna, the prophetess, who serves in the house of God and she holds baby Jesus. There's the woman of noble character in Proverbs 31 who does business; who's praised by her children, by her husband, at the city gates. There's Romans 16

where Paul lists person after person of people who have made his ministry possible and guess what kind of names fill the list? Women - Mary and Junius and Rufus' mom, which is a reference in the Bible; people that Paul says are coworkers, women exalted by the apostles themselves. And then there's Jesus who's not just served and believed in by men but women who are often so much more strong in their faith and faithful than the men at that time. It was women more than men who were with Jesus at this cross. It was women more than men who saw Jesus buried in his tomb. And it was the women who first believed that he was risen from the dead. When the men thought they were being too emotional and lady like in their own chauvinistic way, it was the women who believed the truth: That Jesus was alive and their salvation was secure. So if you think the Bible's a book that tells women to cook and clean and prepare for the potluck, you haven't read the same book as I have because this book is full of capable, strong, incredible women.

So can I give a challenge and encouragement to all the sisters in the faith who are listening to me today? Follow in the biblical footsteps of these incredible women and lift up the name of God. For the sake of your own heart and for the sake of the people around you, seek God with a passion, know his word, because to be honest with you ladies, we men need you. Just like Barak needed Deborah, there are so many men who need a strong woman in their life. Whether they're single or married, whether you're the sister, the girlfriend, the daughter or just a member of the church, can I tell you something about guys? We think so often about the numbers that we forget about the name. We think about the budget, we think about the credit card bills, we think about how much money we can make and how much we can spend. We think about horsepower and win-losses and touchdown records and how many feet is the boat and how many points is the buck. We think about numbers, numbers, numbers and so often when we need it most, we forget about the name of God. We forget that God is glorious and that God is powerful. And this sickness and this debt and this person at work, it's nothing compared to the name of God. We sit upon our little Mount Tabors and we shiver in fear because we forget that God is with us. But if you women know the name of God, if you pray the Lord's Prayer - "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name," - God, let your name be holy and big and beautiful and unstoppable to me. I guarantee, you will be such a gift to the men in your life. Families cannot function without strong Christian women. The church cannot survive without strong Christian women. What we need in these days more than any other is not for women to run to the sides and let me do the work but like Deborah and Jael, for courageous, godly, faithful women to remember the name of God.

But there's something else in this story, isn't there? In fact, if you read Judges 5 after church today, you'd find that Barak and Deborah sing this song and she's the lead vocalist and the very first thing she says in the song is, "How blessed it is when the princes of Israel take the lead." When the princes step up and they lead. When the men of Israel willingly offer themselves, praise the Lord, Deborah herself sings.

So let me speak to the guys who are here today. God is calling you to lead. Not to be the king of the castle, not to abuse your authority, not to look down on women in any way. They are equal sisters in the body of Christ but God has given us this unique challenging calling and our families and our churches need it so desperately. Ladies, you can correct me after church if I'm wrong, but when I meet women, I think that women are saying to me, "I love it when a man has

a plan. When I don't have to be a mother to him and nag him and tell him to get things done. When he actually wants to pray and he wants to lead our family to church and he has a plan for our family and for our future." That's not oppressive to women; it's inspiring. No woman wants to get married and to come up with a to do list for her husband; to nag him and remind him you need to get these things done. When he leads, when he is passionate, when he says, "I'm going to get our family closer to God and here's how I think we should do it," and praise the Lord. What a blessing that is.

And so, guys, that's my challenge to you today. Have a plan. Maybe you don't know much about the Bible. Maybe you're not good at reading. Maybe it intimidates you to pray out loud. I guarantee you the women in your life don't care. I want you to put into your calendars church as a non-negotiable. When your favorite team is playing, you clear out the calendar and you make it happen. When God is playing, when he's stepping up to speak to us in his word, let's make sure we're there and throughout the week as we lead our families in prayer.

So there's the tension: Capable strong women, called spiritual men. And I wish I had two more hours to answer all the questions that are in your mind right now. "Okay, Pastor, but what about this," you know? "In the church, someone's got to be in this position so who can it be? And in our home, what does it mean to lead and to submit and the head of the wife? Do we have to make decisions?" Those are great questions and guess what? There is no rulebook. I can make up some black and white laws that are in the Bible but there isn't; there's just this tension between this one and that one. And together, as brothers and sisters, we'll have to struggle with it and apply this the best we can; to be patient, to be kind, to be humble, and to love every person, male or female, that God brings into our church.

I want to take you back to the text of Judges 4 where Deborah said, "The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you: 'I the Lord will give Sisera into your hands.' The Lord will deliver Sisera. This is the day the Lord has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the Lord gone ahead of you?" Deborah wasn't fighting for more rights and strength and position; she was trying to proclaim the name of the Lord. And if there's one thing I want you to leave this message with today is that this is not just a tension that we have to deal with in our families, in our churches. This is from God. In fact, if you're taking notes, that's your last fill in the blank for today. It's not just a tension between capable women and called men; it is a God-given tension between capable women and called men.

You see, brothers and sisters, there is a God who made you. He knit you together in your mother's womb and that God decided if you would be male or female. You have a father who loves having sons and he loves just as much having daughters. He is the God of chromosomes and he decided your gender. That's your God. And he didn't just make you; he saved you. Jesus didn't just die to create a boy's club but to create the holy Christian church, which he calls his bride, which he adores. You see, 2,000 years ago, Jesus wasn't like Deborah. He didn't sit at the base of a tree and make decisions. He climbed up a tree called the cross and he died. He didn't reach for a tent peg like Jael to smash his enemies; he was smashed with the nails of the cross by his enemies. Except just like Jael smashed the monster called Sisera, Jesus smashed your sin and Satan and death so that you could be part of the family of God.

Did you ever think about that? That God is your dad? I'm not sure what your dad is like on earth. Maybe he was absent; maybe you don't know him. Maybe he was abusive; maybe he drank too much. Maybe he was kind of there; maybe he loved his job. Maybe he was amazing. But whatever your dad on earth was like, you have a father who's in heaven and because of Jesus, that father is proud of you! You ever think about that? It changes the course of a person's life when they have a loving father who's proud of them and you do! When you bring your spiritual report card home to your Father in heaven, he's not looking at the A- or the B+ or the class you flunked. Instead, he's delighted in you. He's proud of you. Do you believe that? No matter what people at work think, there is a God who runs the universe and when he thinks about you, he jumps up and down. He shows the pictures on his phone to the angels because he can't wait to boast about you.

That's the God we're talking about. This isn't some archaic book that needs to learn so much about gender roles; this is a book that God himself inspired. And if we remember that, that these teachings come from God, we're going to be okay. No matter how controversial, no matter how much the times change, you and I as brothers and sisters are going to be okay. And we need to be because the world's not okay. The world is broken and there are men who are chasing the numbers at the expense of their souls. There are women who are joining their voices saying, "Me, too," because they haven't been loved and protected and cherished like Jesus cherishes them. And so we need every one of you - male and female with all of your gifts and strengths - to lift up the name of God.

Right in the middle of this tension, I didn't know what to say to you and so I bought a book called, "Women and God." It was written by a female author and I brought it home in the middle of the day when my house was quiet and I started to read the chapters and soak in female Christian perspective. But I wasn't more than a chapter in when I heard the garage door go up and when my two daughters saw my van in the garage, they burst through the door. I heard the pitter patter of four little feet and they came into the bedroom and they leapt over the end of that couch like there wasn't even a book in my hand. And dad became the jungle gym and they laughed and they giggled and I tickled them and I looked and then my bride walked in the door. This woman who is so strong and has blessed me in so many ways. And as I see these two little girls grow up and their gifts develop, there is nothing that I want more for them than to serve God with all their heart. And I know the best way to do it: To lead them. To lead them to Jesus, the source of all peace and hope and confidence.

And so, brothers and sisters, no matter what your calling, what your gender, what your relationship status, let's join our strengths and our capabilities to march together to the cross of Jesus where every enemy is conquered and where his glory is praise to the end of the age. And all God's people who love his name, male and female, join their voices and they said, "Amen."

Let's pray.

Dear God, thank you for being a perfect Father. Man, we, your kids, have messed things up so often and so badly. I think of how many men like me have belittled women and thought too little of women and gave into a sexist culture. We have not valued your daughters as we should. And I think in our culture, God, how that pendulum has swung. In an age of Homer Simpson and

Family Guy; how men are comedic sidekicks instead of strong leaders. And so, we need you, God, to change us one by one; that we would love every son and every daughter as much as you do.

God, I pray for our church. I pray that we would be different. I pray that we would be a church that could hold onto this teaching and distinction and yet, every person who comes in here - especially our sisters in the faith - would feel so heard and understood and valued and included that the world simply couldn't understand why we find such joy that we do.

So Father, would you send your Holy Spirit into every heart? Would you fill us that we could use all of our gifts to pursue you together? I'm so thankful, Father, that you're forgiving. I'm so thankful that you're with us. And I'm so thankful that you love to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask you. So we're asking you today, Dad, give us the spirit that we can serve you faithfully. We pray all these things, Jesus, in your power, beautiful, and saving name, Amen.



TIME OF GRACE®

That's Messed Up: Not Just a Boys' Club

Study Notes

Summary

A quivering commander. A female savior. A housewife who plunges a tent peg through a general's brain. That's messed up! But that's what happened in Deborah's day. Her unlikely story proves that God blesses and saves his people through those we would least expect—little children, common mothers, and a carpenter from Nazareth.

- **Judges 4:1-3:** ¹Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, now that Ehud was dead. ²So 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. ³Because he had nine hundred chariots fitted with iron and had cruelly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years, they cried to the LORD for help.
- **Judges 4:4,5:** ⁴Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. ⁵She 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.
- **Judges 4:6-8:** ⁶She 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. ⁷I 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.'" ⁸Barak said to her, "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go."
- **Judges 4:9,10:** 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. ¹⁰There Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali, and ten thousand men went up under his command. Deborah also went up with him.
- **Judges 4:11:** Now Heber the Kenite had left the other Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, Moses' brother-in-law, and pitched his tent by the great tree in Zaananim near Kedesh.
- **Judges 4:12-16:** ¹²When they told Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, ¹³Sisera summoned from Harosheth Haggoyim to the Kishon River all his men and his nine hundred chariots fitted with iron. ¹⁴Then Deborah said to Barak,

“Go! This is the day the LORD has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the LORD gone ahead of you?” So Barak went down Mount Tabor, with ten thousand men following him. ¹⁵ At Barak’s advance, the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and army by the sword, and Sisera got down from his chariot and fled on foot. ¹⁶ Barak pursued the chariots and army as far as Harosheth Haggoyim, and all Sisera’s troops fell by the sword; not a man was left.

- **Judges 4:17-22:** ¹⁷ Sisera, meanwhile, fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because there was an alliance between Jabin king of Hazor and the family of Heber the Kenite. ¹⁸ Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, “Come, my lord, come right in. Don’t be afraid.” So he entered her tent, and she covered him with a blanket. ¹⁹ “I’m thirsty,” he said. “Please give me some water.” She opened a skin of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him up. ²⁰ “Stand in the doorway of the tent,” he told her. “If someone comes by and asks you, ‘Is anyone in there?’ say ‘No.’” ²¹ But Jael, Heber’s wife, picked up a tent peg and a hammer and went quietly to him while he lay fast asleep, exhausted. She drove the peg through his temple into the ground, and he died. ²² Just then Barak came by in pursuit of Sisera, and Jael went out to meet him. “Come,” she said, “I will show you the man you’re looking for.” So he went in with her, and there lay Sisera with the tent peg through his temple—dead.
- There is a God-given tension between _____ women and _____ men.
- **Judges 5:1,2:** 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!
- **Select verses from Judges 4:** “The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you. . . . I will give [Sisera] into your hands. . . . The LORD will deliver Sisera. . . . This is the day the LORD has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the LORD gone ahead of you?”
- There is a _____ tension between _____ women and _____ men.

Points to Ponder

1. What has been your experience with the callings of men and women in the church? Have your church leaders faithfully taught both truths that lead to this tension? Have they overemphasized one or the other?
2. Study 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:26-40; Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Timothy 2:8-15; and 1 Peter 3:1-7 to dig into the New Testament’s teaching of this tension.

Homework for Next Week

Read Judges chapters 6-8.

“Whenever there’s obedience to the word of God, he brings blessing.”
—Wayne Grudem