QUESTION #1

Who do you know that’s good at influencing others?
“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.

THE POINT

Use your influence for God’s kingdom and for His honor.
WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Judges 4:1-5

1 The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord after Ehud had died. 2 So the Lord sold them to King Jabin of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera who lived in Harosheth of the Nations. 3 Then the Israelites cried out to the Lord, because Jabin had nine hundred iron chariots, and he harshly oppressed them twenty years. 4 Deborah, a prophetess and the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. 5 She would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to settle disputes.

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**
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 summoned Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, “Hasn’t the Lord, the God of Israel, commanded you: ‘Go, deploy the troops on Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men from the Naphtalites and Zebulunites? 7 Then I will lure Sisera commander of Jabin’s army, his chariots, and his infantry at the Wadi Kishon to fight against you, and I will hand him over to you.’” 8 Barak said to her, “If you will go with me, I will go. But if you will not go with me, I will not go.” 9 “I will gladly go with you,” she said, “but you will receive no honor on the road you are about to take, because the Lord will sell Sisera to a woman.” So Deborah got up and 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:** “Deploy the troops on Mount Tabor” (v. 6).
- **A specific number:** “Take with you ten thousand men” (v. 6).
- **A specific outcome:** “I will hand him over to you” (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 calling as a prophetess and judge, 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.

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**QUESTION #3**

_When has God used someone else to encourage you to step into a ministry opportunity?_
Judges 5:1-5

1 On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang:
2 When the leaders lead in Israel, when the people volunteer, blessed be the Lord. 3 Listen, kings! Pay attention, princes! I will sing to the Lord; I will sing praise to the Lord God of Israel.
4 Lord, when you came from Seir, when you marched from the fields of Edom, the earth trembled, the skies poured rain, and the clouds poured water. 5 The mountains melted before the Lord, even 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. “That day God subdued King Jabin of Canaan before the Israelites. The power of the Israelites continued to increase against King Jabin 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 God of Israel” stepped in, “The earth trembled, the skies poured rain, and the clouds poured water. The mountains melted before the Lord.” Clearly, the false god of the storm was no match for the Lord of the universe.
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.

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

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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*