



FAITH
IN FOCUS



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WEEK ONE JUDGES 4:1-24

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WEEK FOUR 1 SAMUEL 25:2-38

Faith is not merely believing the right things about God; faith is learning to see God clearly enough to act faithfully in the moment before us.

These women are not given long biographies, but each one steps into the biblical narrative with remarkable clarity. They see what others miss. They act when others hesitate. Deborah's courage, Anna's witness, Hannah's surrender, and Abigail's wisdom invite us to ask: *What has my faith brought into focus?*

WEEK ONE

NOTES

JUDGES 4:1-24

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. 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. ¹⁰ There Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali, and ten thousand men went up under his command. Deborah also went up with him.

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.

¹² When they told Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam

had gone up to Mount Tabor, ¹³ Sisera summoned from Harosheth Haggoyim to the Kishon River all his men and his nine hundred chariots fitted with iron.

¹⁴ 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 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. 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.

²³ On that day God subdued Jabin king of Canaan before the Israelites. ²⁴ And the hand of the Israelites pressed harder and harder against Jabin king of Canaan until they destroyed him.

QUESTIONS

The book of Judges shows Israel repeatedly forgetting God, suffering the consequences, crying out, and being rescued. Where do you see similar cycles in your own life, in the church, or in our culture?

Deborah seems deeply confident in what God has spoken. What helps you discern God's voice, and what makes it difficult to trust or obey what He is saying?

God's call to Barak was specific and personal. How does it make you feel to consider that God may have a specific calling or assignment for you?

Deborah and Jael were both unlikely instruments of deliverance in their cultural moment. Who are the people today we may be tempted to overlook, even though God may be working powerfully through them?

Deborah's confidence was rooted in God and in what God was doing through her. What would it look like for you this week to act with confidence in God rather than confidence in yourself?

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passage is a perfect example. Anna had been a fixture at the temple courts for the over 50 years. She had always been there. As a widow, she would have been struggling to make it, just biding her time until God calls her home.

Since she had been in the temple fasting, praying, and worshipping the Lord for decades, she was deeply connected to the Father. The Father rewards her faithfulness by revealing to her that Jesus is the Messiah. The whole reason she lived so long may have been for this moment when she had the opportunity to lay her eyes on the Savior of the world.

Her first response when she realizes that a promise had been fulfilled was to give thanks to God. She didn't celebrate herself for being part of a historic moment. She gave all the glory and thanks to God.

Anna gives us a guide to how to live life. Dedicate your life to pursuing the presence of God, worship him all day with everything you have, and thank God for everything you have been given.

QUESTIONS

Anna spent decades worshiping, fasting, and praying in the temple. What does her life teach us about faithfulness in a culture like ours that often values speed, visibility, and immediate results?

Anna recognized Jesus because she had spent years attending to the presence of God. What practices help you become more aware of God's presence in your daily life?

Anna's first response to seeing Jesus was thanksgiving. What does gratitude reveal about our relationship with God?

Wisdom can come from surprising people and places. Who are the people in our world, church, or community we might overlook but need to listen to more carefully?

Anna had waited a long time to see God's promise fulfilled. How do you remain faithful when God's timing feels slow or unclear?

Anna spoke about Jesus to those who were looking for redemption. Where do you see people longing for redemption, hope, or restoration today?

WEEK THREE

NOTES

1 SAMUEL 1:1-28

¹There was a certain man from Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. ² He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.

³ Year after year this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the Lord Almighty at Shiloh, where Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the Lord. ⁴ Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. ⁵ But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the Lord had closed her womb. ⁶ Because the Lord had closed Hannah's womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. ⁷ This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the Lord, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat. ⁸ Her husband Elkanah would say to her, "Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?"

⁹ Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the Lord's house. ¹⁰ In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly. ¹¹ And she made a vow, saying, "Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."

¹² As she kept on praying to the Lord, Eli observed

her mouth. ¹³ Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk ¹⁴ and said to her, "How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine."

¹⁵ "Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the Lord. ¹⁶ Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief."

¹⁷ Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him."

¹⁸ She said, "May your servant find favor in your eyes." Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.

¹⁹ Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the Lord and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah made love to his wife Hannah, and the Lord remembered her. ²⁰ So in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, "Because I asked the Lord for him."

²¹ When her husband Elkanah went up with all his family to offer the annual sacrifice to the Lord and to fulfill his vow, ²² Hannah did not go. She said to her husband, "After the boy is weaned, I will take him and present him before the Lord, and he will live there always."

²³ "Do what seems best to you," her husband Elkanah told her. "Stay here until you have weaned him; only may the Lord make good his word." So the woman stayed at home and nursed her son until she had weaned him.

²⁴ After he was weaned, she took the boy with her, young as he was, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh. ²⁵ When the bull had been sacrificed, they brought the boy to Eli, ²⁶ and she said to him, "Pardon me, my lord. As surely as you live, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying

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to the Lord.²⁷ I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him.²⁸ So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord.” And he worshiped the Lord there.

How do you handle things you deem impossible to accomplish? Do you write them off as things to not think about, or do you get stuck on how you might be able to figure it out? How you might be able to figure out how to do what others haven't yet done?

Jasmin Paris is an ultra-marathoner from Great Britain. She has long been the woman associated with doing things no one else had yet done. In 2019, she set a new race record for the Spine Race, a 268 mile race through England and Scotland. She was the first woman to win the overall race, and she beat the existing record by 12 hours.

This is just one example of her many accolades. As her ultra-marathon records and awards stacked up, people started encouraging Jasmin to run the Barkley Marathons. This race, established in 1995, has only been finished 26 times. Most years, there are no finishers, and a woman had never finished.

This race covers over 100 miles consisting of 5 loops up and down the mountains of eastern Tennessee. To max out the difficulty of the race, there is a time limit for each loop. Not only did Jasmin cover the more than 100 miles with more than 27,000 feet of elevation gain, she did it within the 60 hour time limit and had 99 seconds to spare.

Was it possible? Barely.

We are capable of impossible things. Especially when we don't try to do things on our own. While the runners at Barkley do all the running, they aren't the only ones who work. Each runner has a team that can help them between loops. By giving them new shoes, dry clothes, food, hydration, a little bit of rest, or fresh batteries in their head lamps. At the Barkley, it is a total team effort to get anyone across the finish line.

This is kind of like life. We can't do life alone.

Sometimes it's obvious that we are totally dependent upon God. Other times, we believe we are making it on our own.

In this story, it is obvious that Hannah is totally dependent on, and even desperate for, God to show up. She couldn't continue with life the way it was going. She needed God to intervene.

Handing everything over to God can look crazy. The priest who was in the temple at the time Hannah was going to pray thought she was drunk. The priest had no idea of the anguish Hannah was experiencing or the daily suffering she lived with. He just saw a woman with her lips moving but no sound coming out.

Have you ever been in a situation where, in the moment, things seem really difficult, even impossible? In that moment, maybe you made a promise to God. Something like, "God if you get me out of this situation then I'll..."

This kind of moment can be referred to as a "foxhole confession". This term stems from times of war. When things seemed dark and impossible, the men would cry out to God as their last hope.

What happens when God comes through? Are we willing and capable of keeping the promises we made in the impossible situation? It is one thing to say I promise and quite another to follow through with keeping it.

Imagine Hannah. She is loved by her husband but living in a time in history where value was placed on the ability to provide children. She had offered no children, but her husband still loved her. She wanted to fit in, silence her critics, be a mother, and be the woman she felt she was born to be. For her, that was tied to having kids. She begged God and made a promise to Him.

When God came through with His end of the deal (which is just like God to do), what was Hannah going to do?

She did the impossible, and she kept her promise.

QUESTIONS

Hannah faced a situation that felt impossible and deeply painful. How do you typically respond when something in your life feels impossible: do you give up, try harder, isolate, ask for help, or turn to God?

The reflection compares Hannah's dependence on God to an endurance race that cannot be finished alone. Who has God placed in your life to help you keep going when you are weary?

Hannah's prayer was so intense that Eli misunderstood her. What does her story teach us about bringing our honest anguish, desperation, and longing before God?

Hannah made a promise to God in the middle of her pain. Why is it often easier to make promises to God in desperation than to keep them after He comes through?

After Samuel was born, Hannah did the difficult and faithful thing by keeping her promise. What does her obedience teach us about trust, surrender, and worship?

Hannah's story reminds us that God sees the pain others may misunderstand or overlook. Where do you need to trust that God sees you clearly, even if others do not?

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stayed with the supplies.

¹⁴ One of the servants told Abigail, Nabal's wife, "David sent messengers from the wilderness to give our master his greetings, but he hurled insults at them. ¹⁵ Yet these men were very good to us. They did not mistreat us, and the whole time we were out in the fields near them nothing was missing. ¹⁶ Night and day they were a wall around us the whole time we were herding our sheep near them. ¹⁷ Now think it over and see what you can do, because disaster is hanging over our master and his whole household. He is such a wicked man that no one can talk to him."

¹⁸ Abigail acted quickly. She took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep, five seahs of roasted grain, a hundred cakes of raisins and two hundred cakes of pressed figs, and loaded them on donkeys. ¹⁹ Then she told her servants, "Go on ahead; I'll follow you." But she did not tell her husband Nabal.

²⁰ As she came riding her donkey into a mountain ravine, there were David and his men descending toward her, and she met them. ²¹ David had just said, "It's been useless—all my watching over this fellow's property in the wilderness so that nothing of his was missing. He has paid me back evil for good. ²² May God deal with David, be it ever so severely, if by morning I leave alive one male of all who belong to him!"

²³ When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed down before David with her face to the ground. ²⁴ She fell at his feet and said: "Pardon your servant, my lord, and let me speak to you; hear what your servant has to say. ²⁵ Please pay no attention, my lord, to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name—his name means Fool, and folly goes with him. And as for me, your servant, I did not see the men my lord sent. ²⁶ And now, my lord, as surely as the Lord your God lives and as you live, since the Lord has kept you from bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hands, may your enemies and all who are intent on harming my lord be like Nabal. ²⁷ And let this gift, which your servant

has brought to my lord, be given to the men who follow you.

²⁸ “Please forgive your servant’s presumption. The Lord your God will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my lord, because you fight the Lord’s battles, and no wrongdoing will be found in you as long as you live. ²⁹ Even though someone is pursuing you to take your life, the life of my lord will be bound securely in the bundle of the living by the Lord your God, but the lives of your enemies he will hurl away as from the pocket of a sling. ³⁰ When the Lord has fulfilled for my lord every good thing he promised concerning him and has appointed him ruler over Israel, ³¹ my lord will not have on his conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself. And when the Lord your God has brought my lord success, remember your servant.”

³² David said to Abigail, “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me.

³³ May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands. ³⁴ Otherwise, as surely as the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, who has kept me from harming you, if you had not come quickly to meet me, not one male belonging to Nabal would have been left alive by daybreak.”

³⁵ Then David accepted from her hand what she had brought him and said, “Go home in peace. I have heard your words and granted your request.”

³⁶ When Abigail went to Nabal, he was in the house holding a banquet like that of a king. He was in high spirits and very drunk. So she told him nothing at all until daybreak. ³⁷ Then in the morning, when Nabal was sober, his wife told him all these things, and his heart failed him and he became like a stone. ³⁸ About ten days later, the Lord struck Nabal and he died.

An intermediary is a go-between, a third party who facilitates communications between two others.

We understand this concept because we are first introduced to intermediaries in middle school when

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we were too shy or embarrassed to talk directly to any members of the opposite gender.

Over the centuries, there have been some really valuable intermediaries that we may or may not know about.

Edith Wilson stands out as one you may not think about. Edith was born in 1872, and she received little formal education. However, she was taught extensively by her invalid grandmother.

Edith became a widow at just 36 years old. In March 1915, she was introduced to a fellow widower who just happened to be the current president of the United States, Woodrow Wilson.

Serving as the First Lady during wartime created some unique opportunities to lead the country. She led the effort in the White House to set an example for the federal rationing effort by having “gasless Sundays”, “meatless Mondays”, and “wheatless Wednesdays” during World War I. She even had sheep brought in to “mow” the White House lawn.

Her duties as First Lady remained fairly normal until October of 1919 when the president suffered a stroke. Edith took control of her husband’s health and his official interactions to the point that few, even within the White House, knew the total extent of the president’s infirmities.

She alone decided what information got taken to the president for him to wrestle with and what just “got handled”.

Was Edith Wilson acting as president for the last 18 months of her husband’s term? She would have said no. She never made a decision regarding public affairs. The only decisions she made were regarding what issues were important enough to be brought to the president.

The reality is, she was often the only person besides

QUESTIONS

Abigail stepped into a dangerous and volatile situation with urgency, wisdom, and courage. What stands out to you about the way she responded?

Nabal's foolishness put his whole household at risk, while David's anger nearly led him into sin. What does this story teach us about the consequences of foolishness, pride, and unchecked anger?

Abigail acted as an intermediary between David and disaster. When have you seen someone step in wisely and prevent greater harm?

Abigail spoke to David with both humility and truth. What can we learn from her about how to confront someone respectfully and courageously?

David received Abigail's correction as an act of God's mercy. What makes correction hard to receive, and how can we become people who listen when God uses others to redirect us?

When we are connected to God, we can make decisions that have Kingdom impact. What decision, conversation, or relationship in your life might need that kind of God-shaped wisdom right now?

