CHAPTER 8, A FEW GOOD MEN AND WOMEN

TIMELESS TRUTH: THE CALL VS. THE CULTURE - AN ETERNAL PROBLEM

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The nation of Israel had a place to call home at last. Settling into the Promised Land enabled them to leave behind their wandering ways and fulfill one of the key promises to Abraham: a land for God's people to occupy. But, failing to evict the Canaanites from the land, these pagan neighbors became a toxic influence on a nation called to be different.

After the death of Joshua, God's people felt this pull of worldly culture and a destructive pattern emerged:

- Israel turned again and again to the worship of pagan gods.
- God brought divine judgment.
- Israel cried out for God's help.
- God raised up a judge to save them.

This cycle of sin became the pattern of life in Israel for the next 300 years.

Early on, Israel was conquered by the Canaanite king, Jabin. God appointed Deborah, a prophet, judge, and strong leader to deliver her people. She and her military leader, Barak, defeated the powerful Canaanite army led by Sisera. He escaped and took refuge in the tent of a woman named Jael, who killed him while he slept. Israel had been delivered for now, but the cycle would continue.

Israel was later oppressed by the Midianites. God called Gideon out of nowhere to deliver His people. Gideon was pretty sure that God has mistaken him for some well-built four-star Israelite commander and asked twice for a miraculous sign. God confirmed His intentions and Gideon gathered 32,000 troops to take on the vast Midianite army. God, however, trimmed their forces to just 300 men. He used them to rout the Midianites and the people enjoyed freedom…for a while.

The cycle continued and Israel was soon dominated by the Philistines. This time God prepared a deliverer by promising a child to a barren woman. This child, Samson, was to be raised as a Nazirite, who was set apart to God. His hair was not to be cut and he was to drink no wine. He was well known for his superhuman strength and less than super character, especially in the company of beautiful women. His second wife, Delilah, betrayed him by cutting his hair so he would forfeit his advantage and God's favor. Samson himself embodied this insidious cycle that had enslaved Israel, with his saw-tooth history of indiscretions and victories.

As a result, the Philistines took him captive and gouged out his eyes. But his hair grew back, and his strength returned. Samson's last day was his best one. He was brought into the Philistine temple to entertain their leaders. He prayed to the LORD, collapsed the pillars of the temple and defeated the Philistines at last.

God is never bashful about His intentions for His people. He never tolerates sin and, at the same time, never breaks His covenant with His people. Israel may not have fully understood God's discipline, but over and over He had to bring them to their knees in order to bring them to Himself.

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ICEBREAKER QUESTION: Have you ever been rescued from a dangerous or difficult situation? What happened?

1. Israel is constantly running from the true God to other false gods. What are some of the false gods in our culture today? Which of them have you trusted?
2. False gods trigger a cycle: a web of sin, God's judgments, crying out for help, and God providing deliverance. What are some destructive cycles you have seen in your own life?
3. Do you think that the Israelites did a good job of passing their faith to the next generation? How can we do this better in the church and in our own families?
4. How would you describe Deborah? In what way does her story influence your view of women in leadership?
5. Do you think Gideon's request for a sign was an act of faith or an act of faithlessness? Does his faith change over time?
6. Your friend, Samson, confides in you that he has trouble with women but doesn't understand why. What would you tell him?
7. In what ways was Samson a faithful man of God? In what ways was he not?
8. What was Samson's true weakness? How can you deal with your weaknesses before they become your downfall?
9. Where do you see God's grace in this chapter?
10. Which character in this chapter stands out to you and why? How can you be more like them?

In the time remaining ask your group members to share any of their personal reflection insights from their journal entries.

CLOSING PRAYER

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CHAPTER 9, THE FAITH OF A FOREIGN WOMAN

Journal your answers to these questions as you read through the chapter this week. You may wish to read one day and journal the next, or spread the questions over the whole week.

DAY 1

1. How would you describe the relationship between Naomi and her daughter-in-law? Is there anything you can apply to your relationship with your in-laws or future in-laws?
2. Ruth and Boaz provided for Naomi. In what tangible ways can you provide for the less fortunate both in your family and your community?

DAY 2

1. Boaz praised Ruth saying, "May the LORD repay you for what you have done [for Naomi]. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge". How did God answer Boaz' prayer for Ruth? How does an "others-centered" life create blessings for the giver?
2. As you reflect on times of need in your life, when have you experienced divine providence and unexpected provision?
3. Character is revealed by what we do, what we say, and often by what others say about us. How does Boaz serve as an example of a godly man or Ruth as a godly woman for you?

DAY 3

1. The theme of redemption is found throughout this story. Compare Boaz' redemption of Ruth and Naomi to how Christ has redeemed you.
2. Faithful Boaz and Ruth were great-grandparents to King David and therefore they were also in the line of Messiah Jesus. Who in your family tree has been a godly example to you? Who in your church family stands as an example of godliness?

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