

Week 14

April 2 - April 8

Judges 7-25; Ruth 1-4; 1 Samuel 1:1-8; 1 Chronicles 2:9-55; 4:1-23

After reading through these passages, the results of my brainstorming leads to a theme that runs along the lines of; big things with little people, impressive with unimpressive, imposing with unimposing, splendid with simple, or heroic undertakings by humble people.

These passages address the fact that God can use the most unassuming person to accomplish all He has in mind. An individual does not need a long list of impressive credentials, terrific looks or great strength, but merely a heart willing to serve and follow God (and of course a person filled with the Spirit of God). May you be encouraged by this truth.

April 2nd

Judges 7:1-9:21. "Little Gideon's Big God"

God gave Gideon a tremendous task: defeat the Midianites. Gideon asked how he—the weakest of the family from the weakest clan—could save anyone (6:15). The LORD emphasizes the point by even making Gideon's army look rather weak.

The Midianites numbered 135,000 strong. Gideon's army numbered 32,000 at its peak. Then 22,000 went home when Gideon allowed any of the frightened to leave. Next was the test for how they drank water (just another way of God thinning out the group), and finally only 300 men were left.

OK, what about weapons? It is possible that the men had swords, but the "weapons" listed for each man was a horn, a clay pot, and a torch. Three hundred men armed with pots led by an unfamiliar man who was first found hiding from the enemy (6:11), conquered a well-trained world power army of 135,000.

In the end no one could say the armies of Midian were conquered because of powerful warriors, or well-trained leaders, or the most modern weaponry. It could only be said that God saved Israel. God left no doubt.

April 3rd

Judges 9:22-12:7. "Submissive Examples"

Throughout the book of Judges we are introduced to often unfamiliar people whom God used to bring peace to Israel. We will read of twelve men and women referred to as the judges who bring deliverance to God's people.

It was less that they were gifted, pure, or special, as they were willing to be used by God. The achievements of those submissive to God should stir our hearts to the same.

The story of Jephthah is an intriguing one. An illegitimate son; born of a prostitute; rejected by his family; led a band of rebels; led an army against the Ammonites; and thoroughly defeated them.

Jephthah made a rash vow to the LORD which meant the sacrifice of his only child, his daughter. Although we do not know all the particulars, we do know that this can be analogous with a figure of Christ the great sacrifice: Christ was of unspotted purity and innocence, as she a chaste virgin; He was devoted to death by his Father, and so made an anathema for us; He submitted Himself, as she did, to His Father's will.

April 4th

Judges 12:8-15:20. "Potential"

Here is the story of a man known for his astounding strength, yet, in the same breath also known for his weaknesses. He battled pride and sensuality; he broke his vow and God's laws; he trusted the wrong people; and did not use his gifts and abilities wisely. He was not the wisest of men, but God used him to accomplish His purpose.

Samson had a miraculous start to life and tremendous potential. There is indeed a long list of things he could have done better. I know that the same was said of my life at times. Perhaps the same was said of you. As disheartening as this story could be to us, we could look at it another way: God can use a person of faith in spite of his or her weaknesses.

I don't know about you, but I find that encouraging. God can use me now, as I am. Paul declared, "I have not reached perfection. But I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be" (Phil. 3:12).

April 5th

Judges 16-18. "Finishing Well"

Samson's life did not seem to start or continue as one characterized by faith. To the contrary, he seemed to be self-absorbed and only concerned with the present. Eventually, his choices caught up with him and Samson found himself blind, in chains, pushing the wheel to grind grain in Gaza, the same place he had amazingly carried off the city's gates.

We don't know exactly how long he was enslaved, but obviously long enough for his hair to grow back, and yet more importantly long enough for him to do some serious thinking. I am sure he thought through his life, the choices he made, and the opportunities God had set before him to serve Him and help His people.

The Philistines falsely assumed their god and their power was in charge as they mocked Samson (16:24). Samson prayed to God. God heard and answered. God never leaves us.

In his final victory Samson destroyed more enemies than he had in his entire lifetime. Samson finished well. Samson's faith was chronicled with others in the "Hall of Faith" section of Hebrews 11 (v. 32).

April 6th

Judges 19-21. "Think BEFORE It Is Done"

Here is something to consider. Imagine attending a marriage enrichment seminar and the speaker asks each person to list as many people as they can that would be affected by your having an extramarital affair.

Whether you've thought it through or not, you could literally affect the lives of hundreds in the present and future if you chose to commit adultery.

Sin is not a private affair. Your sin (any sin) will affect others. The passage today is a strong reminder of that fact.

This sin should have been dealt with appropriately and promptly, but it was not. Instead it escalated into a tribal war. In the end, 65,000 soldiers lay dead, and women and children from the surrounding towns in addition to that.

The principle of poor choices affecting many is true of us as well. Unfortunately, we don't often think things through very well in advance. Yet that is what the truly mature thinker does. Maturity is the ability to weigh the consequences before the action. And if the actions are immoral, remember the consequences may be immeasurable.

April 7th

Ruth 1:1-4:12. "Not Overlooked"

The book of Ruth is deeply admired by many for its literary style. It is a beautiful story of love and devotion.

Ruth is an amazing young woman of tremendous character. She has displayed kindness and loyalty to Naomi as she leaves behind the security of her own land, the familiarity of her own customs, the simplicity of her own religion, the refuge of her own family and friends, and everything she has known. She vows she will "not allow anything but death to separate us" (1:17).

Ruth humbly goes to work in the field for Naomi. Ruth wants the best for Naomi, and she works to accomplish that. Ruth's life is full of integrity and God recognizes it as He provides for her in a wonderful way.

Ruth came to Bethlehem as a poor widow, and even worse a despised Moabite. Yet she becomes prosperous through the marriage to Boaz. She also becomes the great-grandmother to the great King David. Furthermore, she is listed in the lineage of Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:5). God honors the humble servant.

April 8th

Ruth 4:13-22; 1 Samuel 1:1-8; 1 Chronicles 2:9-55; 4:1-23. "Unfamiliar Names"

Professional golfer, Karen Permezel, hails from Yackandandah, Australia. Finding that name to be a mouthful, writers sometimes ask Permezel where the town is located. Permezel is happy to be of assistance. "It's near Mount Murramurrabong, not far from Tangambalanga," she replies. (Sports Illustrated)

Today's passages list off plenty of names for us. Some of those names we've never read before in Scripture and may not read of again. Several of those mentioned did great things and walked with the LORD wholeheartedly, and yet much of their life may not be elaborated on. Consider the names you would have if you listed every member of your genealogy in the past 200 years. Although you may have a long list of names you would not have the tremendous deeds and characteristics of many on that list.

Many less-known people have done marvelous things and have lived exemplary lives. If the tradeoff is receiving the praise of men here on Earth or instead receiving the rewards of God in Heaven (Matthew 6:1,4,5,18), I am sure we would take the latter.

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General Questions for each day:

Summarize the day's Bible passage in your own words.

What thoughts, actions, attitudes or beliefs are addressed in the passage?

How is the Holy Spirit leading you to apply this passage to your life today?

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Bible Discussion Guide:

Psalms 139 discusses the knowledge God has of each of us and each moment being laid out by Him. It also tells us that through His marvelous workmanship He uniquely made each of us. Have you ever questioned how God made you? Have you ever wondered why God took you through Course A in life and not B?

How does your contentment (or discontentment) with what you are and where you are presently at in life affect your service and ministry?

Paul's second letter to Timothy explains how we can best serve the Lord and minister to others. The emphasis is not on credentials, looks, or strength, but on faithfulness, work, honorable words and character, etc. "If you keep yourself pure, you will be a utensil God can use for His purpose. Your life will be clean, and you will be ready for the Master to use you for every good work" (2 Timothy 2:21).

Do you presently have some priorities flipped around? Are you working harder on your image with others or your identity with God? How are you serving God?

Are you living up to your potential? This touches on more than gifts and abilities. It also addresses self-discipline and work.

Thinking things through before you do them is more important than it sounds and also more difficult. We struggle with it from the age of 5 to 85. Discuss this point.

From life and Scripture, illustrate the effect of one's sin on others.

What grabbed you the most from the book of Ruth?

Personal application: Are you content with being a "behind the scenes" person?

Why does God love to use the simple to do the splendid?