

# BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

## THE WORSHIP OF GOD • JUNE 20, 2021



### The Scripture Judges 4:1-16

*The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, after Ehud died. So the LORD sold them into the hand of King Jabin of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor; the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-ha-goim. Then the Israelites cried out to the LORD for help; for he had nine hundred chariots of iron, and had oppressed the Israelites cruelly twenty years.*

*At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites came up to her for judgment. She sent and summoned Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, "The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you, 'Go, take position at Mount Tabor, bringing ten thousand from the tribe of Naphtali and the tribe of Zebulun. I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the Wadi Kishon with his chariots and his troops; and I will give him into your hand.'" 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." And she said, "I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." Then Deborah got up and went with Barak to Kedesh.*

*Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and ten thousand warriors went up behind him; and Deborah went up with him. Now Heber the Kenite had separated from the other Kenites, that is, the descendants of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, and had encamped as far away as Elon-bezaananim, which is near Kedesh. When Sisera was told that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, Sisera called out all his chariots, nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the troops who were with him, from Harosheth-ha-goim to the Wadi Kishon. Then Deborah said to Barak, "Up! For this is*

*the day on which the LORD has given Sisera into your hand. The LORD is indeed going out before you.” So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand warriors following him. And the LORD threw Sisera and all his chariots and all his army into a panic before Barak; Sisera got down from his chariot and fled away on foot, while Barak pursued the chariots and the army to Harosheth-ha-goiim. All the army of Sisera fell by the sword; no one was left.*

## **The Message**

### **“11 Indispensable Relationships: You Need a Back Coverer”**

**Mark Briley**

Jeremy looked at me in a way that said it all: “*I got you!*” I was in my mid-twenties, leading a youth program out of Indianapolis and, at that moment, leading our high school students in a week of service among a group of kids in north Philadelphia. We called Jeremy “O.G.” at his invitation – he was the Old Guy (*a good ten years older than me, you know?*). We were serving in an impoverished neighborhood at the day camp for neighborhood kids in that particular north Philly neighborhood.

The subway we would ride to get there each day reported an attack on another rider with a hammer the week before, and the house where many a drug deals went down was across the street from where the camp was held. Our adult sponsor jobs every morning before camp were to pick up the used drug needles and used contraceptives off the playground from the night before, so we could take the kids over to play during the day.

Being responsible for this group of teens, I had my concerns. But O.G. would give me the look every morning before we made the trek saying, “*I’m all in.*” If something goes down, he had my back... and I had his. There’s a lot to reflect on that experience – one that changed me and many in our group for sure. Our hearts were broken and healing all at once as we served with those extraordinary kids of Philly that week. I wake up thinking about them often – wondering how they are doing now in their mid-twenties themselves. Our transformed perspectives of poverty were the most important for sure. But, I can still see that look from O.G. that assured me I wasn’t alone if something went down. Maybe you’ve had that experience of someone “*having your back.*”

On this Father’s Day, some might name your father as one who you just knew was behind you whatever you would face in your life – sometimes words were necessary but most of the time, you just knew he was there... dad had your back. I know there are many mixed emotions today, and if we all took time to tell stories about our fathers – we’d tell them differently about the presence, or lack-there-of, of our dads in our lives. Maybe you are missing your dad today. Maybe your relationship is rocky, or damaged, or the need to forgive still lingers. I pray with those who grieve today. And...

I celebrate the fathers and father-figures who have risen to the occasion to be a meaningful and formative presence in the lives of those they have the privilege to raise. I love and celebrate my own father, who has always been behind my brother, sister, and me no matter the passions we held in our lives. These dads or people who “*have your back*” are not intended to be body-guard types – they are just a presence that often covers your blind spots or, to use a football reference, covers your blindside.

Patrick Mahomes ran for 497 yards to avoid getting sacked during the Super Bowl. That is more than the Bengals leading rusher had all season.



Chiefs’ fans are still trying to forget how little back-coverage Patrick Mahomes had during the Super Bowl loss to Tampa Bay earlier this year. I saw this stat that said, “*Patrick Mahomes ran for 497 yards to avoid getting sacked during the super Bowl. That is more than the Bengals leading rusher had all season.*” See that look on Patrick’s eyes – “*What you talkin’ about, Willis?*” Chiefs’ General Manager, Brett Veach, knew we needed to cover Patrick’s back, so he brought in the likes of Orlando Brown, Jr. to be the blindside tackle to keep Patrick from always wondering if somebody’s got his back. It’s not a glory position. You only get your picture on television when you miss a block, but it often comes

with a salary second only to the quarterback, because it’s worth a whole lot to know that someone’s got the back of your leader on the field.

What am I saying? You need a blind-side tackle as one of your *withnesses*. Life is full of unexpected twists and turns. And unfortunately, there are people who are eager to see you fail. You need a back-coverer. That is the *withness* we will focus on today as we continue our sermon series of the 11 indispensable relationships you need in your life in order to reach your full potential... to be the best you possible.<sup>1</sup> You need to have a trusted soul that has your back. This is not a person to clean up your messes. It is not a cover-*up* kind of person whatsoever. But it is someone who will stand with you when you stand for what is right.

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<sup>1</sup> References in support of this message stem from Leonard Sweet’s “*11 Indispensable Relationships You Can’t be Without*” which inspired this summer series. David C. Cook Publishing. Colorado Springs. 2008.

Martin Luther, leader of the Protestant reformation, was only 34 years old when he posted his Ninety-Five Theses to the chapel door at Wittenberg. I love the coffee mug of Luther that says, “*I’ve got 95 problems but Romans 8:1*” – a little tip of the hat to Jay Z and Luther’s salvific approach found in Romans 8:1 – “*There is now no condemnation in Christ.*” But here is Luther – just 34-years - old – taking a big gulp, standing up to the way it had always been done before – and hammering his Jerry McGuire-like memo to the Wittenberg door representing the institution he was challenging; an incredible act of courage challenging the viewpoints of his own institution’s understanding of faith. He risked everything to do this and when the religious establishment lashed back at him, Frederick the Wise... the elector of Saxony defended Luther against institutional leadership and the Holy Roman Empire. Friedrich, knowing he also had everything to lose by being associated with Luther, said to him in word and deed, “*Marty, I’ve got your back.*”



What a gift and without such a back-coverer who knows if we’d be sitting here now knowing “*Church*” as we do. We see this today during months like June – Pride month; and just a day removed from Juneteenth – a now federal holiday recognizing the final emancipation of slaves in Texas – even years after the Emancipation Proclamation was signed. Someone stood. Others surrounded their courage and said, “*We’ll stand with you.*” The Church, at its best, has been this kind of voice and at its best will continue to be so moving into tomorrow. So... who’s got your back?

Our spotlight *witness*, today, shines on Deborah; an incredible leader we read about in the First Testament... the book of Judges. Once you waded through the difficult names of the text, the heart of it reveals an extraordinary woman. Replace the hard-to-read names of people, places, and things with town names like Boonville and Bunceton and rivers like the Missouri and you’d have a better understanding of what was happening. Don’t get lost in the names of places. Remember the name of this leader. Deborah is only one of three people in the history of Israel who held the offices of prophet, judge, and military leader. Moses and Samuel were the other two... heavyweight company here. Particularly in a patriarchal society, her accomplishments are all the more amazing and a strong encouragement for the Church throughout history who has, unfortunately, not always honored the skills and abilities of women to

be in positions of leadership. Deborah was wise. She delivered justice for the people of God. She confidently commanded generals and elders. She called people back to God and, in turn, was known as “*The Mother of Israel*.” She was a leader in a time of crisis who stood when others shied away in fear.

To understand this story in a wider context, consider the beginning phrase, “*The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.*” **Again**, is the key word here. This refers to a pattern of messiness. As the pattern goes, the Israelites turn away from God and find themselves in a pickle. Opposing nations come in and take over. The Israelites cry out to God, and the Lord rescues them through a judge, or hero, or leader; and when that person dies, the pattern repeats.

It’s as broken a record as the game we played with our kids about Pete and his brother, Re-pete. Do you know this riddle? Pete and Re-pete are brothers. Pete and Re-pete were in a boat. Pete fell out, who’s left? [*RE-PETE!*] Same ol’ story. You may have experienced cyclical living that frustrates you time and time again. You think all is well, and then you mess up, or something happens to you, and you fight through the mess to get back on track again but then it’s something else. It’s why some friends will say, “*Addiction is hard. Recovery is harder.*” You wonder if there is ever an end to the cycle. This was why Deborah was needed.

She had earned the respect of the people, and her influence was such that she was able to call Barak, a general who could gather 10,000 others to fight in a war and tell him what she believed God was calling the people to do. He was willing to do whatever she asked because her wisdom and leadership was proven. He was all in for the battle under one condition. “*If you go with me, I will go,*” he said. “*If you won’t go, then I won’t go.*”

Here’s the underlying scoop you need to know in this moment. Deborah was driven by a desire to please God. Her entire life plan and greatest desire was to please God. As a powerful leader who controlled armies and held the world at her fingertips, she put the ways of God first.

We lose sight of this in our “*get it now and get the most*” world. What is amazing, but shouldn’t be, is that as she strives to please God, those around her become pleased, too. Not always immediately but in the realization of this path as faithful, they get it. We often operate with the opposite mentality. Please others, and hope God is cool with whatever we have chosen to do. I’m a people pleaser. I understand the draw of this mentality but when we simply operate to please others regardless of the cost, we usually end up pleasing them alone, and we do little to advance the just and faithful way of God’s love and desire for all.

In the next chapter of Judges, the famous Deborah's song has a great line that reads, "*When the people willingly offer themselves – praise the Lord.*" (5:2). Her song starts with the idea that we are in this together... and God is leading the way. It is why we need to check our motives. Are we willingly offering ourselves to God? What is driving us? Is it money? Power? Control? Success? Is it corporations or peer pressure or mortgage payments? If that drive is anything other than the desire to do as God desires of us, our own happiness and that of those around us will never be full. This is the tough part. Our human motives are often tainted.

The longer you live, the bleakest realities of the human existence seem to find you, too. Leonard Sweet lists them this way: "*the deterioration of the body, the cruelty of illnesses, the [struggles] of old age, the inevitability of death, and the absolute mess people make of themselves and each other.*"

The higher you climb any ladder, the more people you will find who are willing to knock you off. They will try to kill your reputation, your spirit, or your mission. "*In England, when the Public Executioner died in 1883, the Home Office promptly received no fewer than 1,400 applications from people dying to take his job.*" (Sweet, 11.).

Perhaps such affliction of pain on others makes us feel better about ourselves. Unfortunately, no matter how good you are or pure your motives seem to be, no one is exempt from the persecution of others. If you recall, it was the religious establishment that told Jesus his healing was a work of evil. And what happened to Jesus? They hung him on a cross.

In such a cutthroat world, it is good to have a back-coverer. You won't always know who your Deborah is until the moment arises. You also may not step up to serve as the Deborah for another until you have the opportunity in a given situation. Have courage to stand up for another, who is working for the way of God's love. The Church shouldn't be a place where backbiting occurs, but throughout history it has been known to struggle with this. Someone gets turned off for one reason or another and can no longer see the greater picture. Instead of becoming a place of support for the greater good of Love to press forward, they attack the detail and then all is in jeopardy of derailment.

I'll never forget Grisham White. He's in the resurrection now. He was a Deborah in the church that raised me. Physically, he was a little man... but his soul was huge. He served as an elder in the church and was creeping into his late eighties when I was creeping into adolescence. He always took interest in the youth of our church and their vision for the future. He talked sports and laughed with us and demonstrated faithfulness with his generous heart.

The moment, looking back, where I knew Grisham was a Deborah came at a congregational meeting. I was sophomore in high school. It was an important meeting where we were stepping out in faith as a congregation to embrace some new ideas that would lead our ministry into the next generation and next chapter of our church's life. During the meeting, another man stood and shuffled to the front of the room and stepped to the microphone. He was perhaps the wealthiest man in the congregation and held a high position in town government. He was used to having power and control and was vocal about his personal expectations. He began to lambaste the concepts, the ideas, and personally attack those who were leading the congregation forward. As a 16-year-old kid and son of the pastor, this was an unreal and hurtful experience. I was in awe of what was happening, and the room was so silent you could even hear the Spirit of God gasp.

Then it happened. Grisham stood up and proclaimed, "*This tirade is unacceptable.*" He went on to calmly validate the Spirit of God that was calling our congregation forward in new ways and the others gathered began to stand, one by one, and applaud in support. Grisham was a Deborah in that moment. It was a powerful experience that revealed that the authority moving forward was not money or position or anything other than God's desire as faithfully discerned by the people of the church. The elders of the church also rallied in support of the movement, and we took great strides that day as a congregation to step boldly in faith into our future. The best part of the whole story for me was that the elders didn't give up on the gentlemen who made this tirade. They loved him. He was struggling with some personal demons that may have contributed to the situation. The elders and leaders could have written him off, but they circled him in love and loved him back to life in the community.

When it comes to the history of our faith, some backs have taken some beatings for sure. Jesus' back was lashed repeatedly by the law who saw him as nothing but a troublemaker. His back carried the cross upon which he would be crucified. Paul shares in 2 Corinthians that "*Five times I received from the Jews the 40 lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned.*" The road in pursuit of Truth and faith can be tough. But grace heals. Forgiveness restores. And when back coverers can't arrive in time to derail the moment from occurring at all, they will be the first ones there to love you back to life... Because they are strong people, yes, but they are not just muscle, throwing weight around in bully fashion.

They are strong in wisdom, respected for walking the walk, grounded in God in a humble but confident way. Who is your Deborah? Your Grisham? Who will stand with you when love and life are at stake? And for whom will you stand? It will involve risk. It will call for faith. And it will be worth it all. It will be worth it.

May it be so. Amen.

## Song of Response

### *“Where You Go”*

Words and Music by Michael Tatum

Interlude: *“Stand by Me;”* by Ben E. King, Jerry Leiber, Mike Stolle

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#### *Chorus:*

Where you go, I'll be with you. By your side is where I'll be.  
Through the doubt that stands before us, I'll be there to follow where you lead.

#### *Verse 1:*

If you need me, I'll be there. Just call my name when you're in despair.  
In the good times, and in the bad, I'll stand beside you. I've got your back.

#### *Chorus:*

Where you go, I'll be with you. By your side is where I'll be.  
Through the doubt that stands before us, I'll be there to follow where you lead.

#### *Verse 2:*

When trouble finds you, and you're feeling scared, know that when you need me,  
I'll be there. I won't leave you standing high and dry.  
We can face all battles, together, you and I.

#### *Chorus:*

Where you go, I'll be with you. By your side is where I'll be.  
Through the doubt that stands before us, I'll be there to follow where you lead.

#### *Interlude:*

When the night has come, and the land is dark,  
and the moon is the only light we'll see, no, I won't be afraid.  
Oh, I won't be afraid just as long, as you stand, stand by me.  
Darlin, Darlin, stand by me. Oh, won't you stand by me  
when the moon is the only light we'll see.

#### *Chorus:*

Where you go, I'll be with you. By your side is where I'll be.  
Through the doubt that stands before us, I'll be there to follow where you lead.  
Where you go, I'll be with you. By your side is where I'll be.  
Through the doubt that stands before us, I'll be there to follow where you lead.