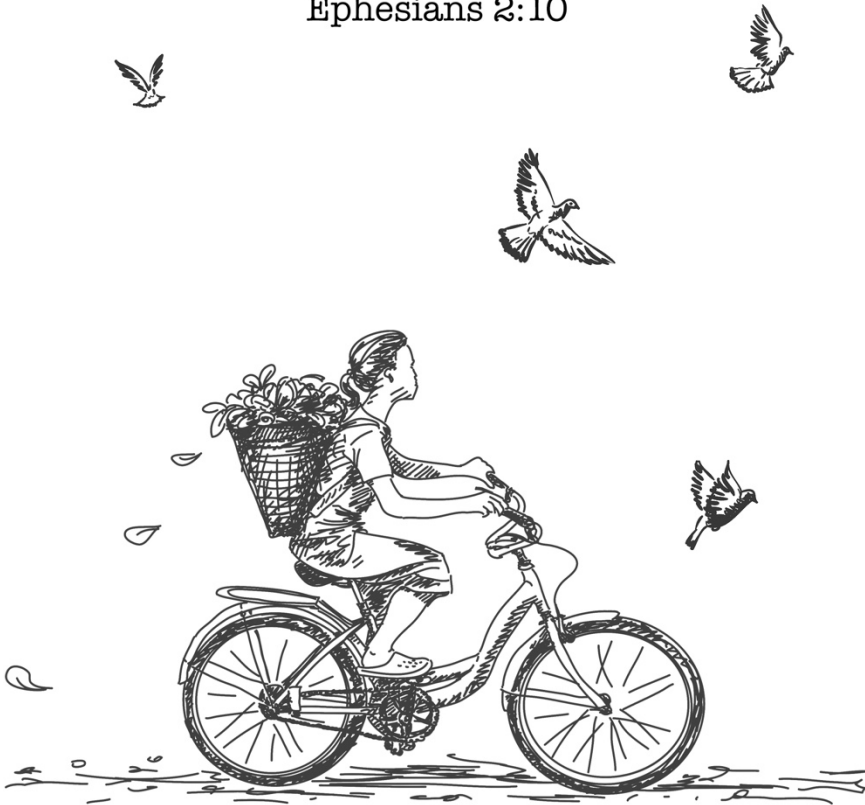


For we are God's handiwork,  
created in Christ Jesus to do good  
works, which God prepared  
in advance for us to do.

Ephesians 2:10



## Chapter Five

# THE BEAUTY OF CRACKED VESSELS

Read: Judges 6 & 7



Looking at the story of Gideon, it's worth noting that he was threshing wheat in a winepress. The Bible tells us that he was there to keep it from the Midianites. Normally the grain was beaten or threshed on a threshing floor where there was ample exposure to the wind. The process that followed, known as winnowing, was used to separate the wheat from the chaff as the winds blew through. Using his pitchfork, a farmer would toss the wheat into the air, and while the seed fell to the ground, the chaff (casing around the seed) was carried away in the wind. Hosea 13:3 compares the wicked to chaff that swirl from the threshing floor.

If you look at an image of an ancient winepress, you'll see a square or circular pit sunk into the ground. It's not a great location for the wind to blow through, and so, this location was highly unusual, but also significant. It wasn't ideal for threshing wheat, but for Gideon, it was a good place to hide out from the Midianites.

## TRIBULATION LEADS US TO REPENTANCE

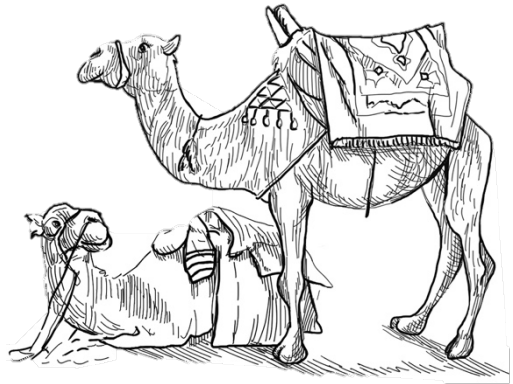
The Midianites were descendants of Midian, a son of Abraham and his second wife Keturah. At this time in history, they were many in number, oppressive, and powerful. Because of the oppression, the Israelites were hiding out for the most part. In fact, the Bible tells us in Judges Chapter 6 that they prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves, and strongholds.

With a large number of camels, they were able to swoop in on enemy territory to ravish it quickly, and so they did as they oppressed the Israelites time and again.

Notice what it says in this verse,

*The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. (Judges 6:1)*

In the same way that God allows us to be tested and tried, this time of tribulation was God's way of waking them up and leading them back to repentance. Now it was time for God's people to fight back, which is where Gideon's mission begins.



## GOD SEES OUR POTENTIAL

Looking at verse 12, I can't help but smile as I look at the title God uses to address him.

“The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.”

This man was hiding out from the enemy, and God saw him as a mighty warrior. Quite different from the world's view of mighty, but then again God does not look at us through that lens.

Just as He saw the potential in Gideon, God sees the potential in both you and me. He knows we are capable of more than we could ever imagine.

“My clan is the weakest,” Gideon said, “and I am the least in my family.”

Here is the thing we so often miss. Our accomplishments are not based on who we think we are, they're based on the power of God working in us and through us. When we truly believe in His power and might, we find the courage to stand when we're not so courageous.



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IT IS NOT MY ABILITY, BUT MY RESPONSE  
TO GOD'S ABILITY, THAT COUNTS.

– CORRIE TEN BOOM

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## DON'T LET FEAR STAND IN THE WAY

Maybe we're not threshing wheat in a winepress like Gideon, but we've all had those days when we're hiding out from the world. Perhaps you can't find the courage to stand up for injustice. Maybe you're struggling to defend your faith and share it with others. Perhaps you've been putting off the one dreadful thing that you know you should do... In any case, today's a good day to put aside fear, step out in faith, and trust God.

“Maybe it will turn out well, and maybe it won’t.” That’s what my sister used to say. She also said, “In any case, you can be sure that God’s in control.”

The Bible says,

*Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let your hands not be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well. (Ecclesiastes 11:6)*



In other words, do your part, and keep doing your part. Don’t let your fear stand in the way of what needs to be done. Whether you fail or succeed is up to the Lord. The question is, have you walked in obedience to God’s will? Have you done the right thing?

## ETERNAL GLORY OUTWEIGHS THE PRICE

Sometimes doing the right thing is the hardest thing you’ll ever do, and sometimes it comes with a price. Even so, it could never compare to the glory that God has prepared.

*For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:17-18)*

As we read the story of Gideon, we see that God takes him from a place of self-reliance to a place of complete reliance on Him. We would be foolish to think that there’s strength in numbers when it comes to the power of God. It didn’t matter that Gideon’s clan was the weakest, or that he was the least in his family; God didn’t want

a mighty army to receive the glory, He wanted to rescue His people Himself. And so, in Judges Chapter 7, we see God pare down Gideon's army of 32,000 to 10,000 men and then again, to a mere 300 before sending them off to the battle. Notice, that's less than 1% of the original size of the army.

*The LORD said to Gideon, You have too many men. I cannot deliver Midian into their hands, or Israel would boast against me, 'My own strength has saved me.'* (Judges 7:2)

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GOD SCORNS AND MOCKS THE DEVIL, IN  
SETTING UNDER HIS VERY NOSE A POOR,  
WEAK, HUMAN CREATURE, MERE DUST  
AND ASHES, YET ENDOWED WITH THE  
FIRSTFRUITS OF THE SPIRIT, AGAINST  
WHOM THE DEVIL CAN DO NOTHING.

– MARTIN LUTHER

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## HE CHOOSES TO USE US

As a parent, it was easier and quicker to do things myself. Even so, I encouraged my children to work alongside me. To wash the dishes, to tidy their rooms, and to help prepare dinner. I knew that learning and working was an important part of the nurturing process, but it was also a way to cultivate our relationship.

In a similar way, we see God working alongside His people. He doesn't "need" us He "chooses" to use us. He longs to be with His children, and so He invites us to be a part of His unfolding story.

God didn't "need" Gideon to fight on His behalf, He wanted him to. And when Gideon was afraid, He encouraged and strengthened Him the way that a Good Father does.

**DID YOU KNOW**

AFTER GIDEON BROKE DOWN THE ALTAR OF BAAL, HE WAS GIVEN THE NICKNAME "JERUB-BAAL," WHICH MEANS BAAL WILL CONTEND WITH HIM.

Think about the things that you are facing today or this week. Maybe something is worrying you or keeping you up at night. You might wonder how you'll get through it or where you'll find the strength to do what needs to be done. It's important in these situations to remember that we're not the one's solving the problem—we're merely a vessel of His wisdom and power.

Think of it this way: imagine a hammer assigned to the task of building a house. If it had a brain like you and I, the hammer might spend the weekend worrying about how it could possibly work. If only it knew that the driving force behind it would be doing the work, the hammer could rest and relax.

It's silly to imagine ourselves in that state, but some days, that's where we're at. Worrying about things that are out of our hands. Afraid of the things that we can't control... We tend to forget that He can, and more importantly, He does.

Remember, you're not the source of your strength, you are merely a tool in the hands of the Master Builder. And so, the Lord warmly reminds us,

*Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Matt. 6:34)*

Some days even the little things add up to a lot. A lot of worry, a lot of concern, a lot of fear and anxiety... but mostly it's a lot of us needing to let go and let God. Needing to trust Him more than we do. Needing to stand back and let Him do His work. If we're stressed, worried, and overthinking our lives, we're still holding on to the reigns, and we need to let go.

Elisabeth Elliot writes,

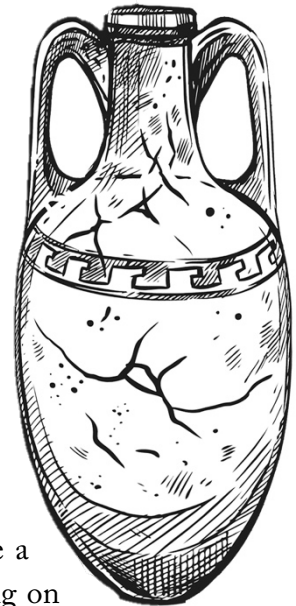
*We are meddling with God's business when we let all manner of imaginings loose, predicting disaster, contemplating possibilities instead of following, one day at a time, God's plain simple pathway. When we try to meet difficulties prematurely, we have neither the light nor the strength for them yet.*

## CRACKED VESSELS

Before we close this chapter on Gideon, I want to point out something out to you, which is, both the beauty and the importance of cracked vessels.

In 2 Corinthians 4:7 we read, "But we have this treasure in jars of clay." And why do we have this treasure? Paul finishes the thought by saying, "to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us." What he's talking about here is the message of Christ. When the jar is broken the light can shine through.

Trials, tribulation, pain, and persecution all have a way of pulling back the curtain to reveal what's going on inside. Brokenness gives us the opportunity to lean on God and to



show the world the source of our strength. The more broken we are, the brighter we shine!

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DON'T SHINE SO OTHERS CAN SEE YOU.  
SHINE SO THAT THROUGH YOU,  
OTHERS CAN SEE HIM.

– C.S. LEWIS

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Charles Spurgeon compares the battle in Judges Chapter 7 to that of a Christian life saying,

“Gideon ordered his men to do two things: covering up a torch in an earthen pitcher, he bade them, at an appointed signal, break the pitcher and let the light shine, and then sound with the trumpet, crying, “The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon!” This is precisely what all Christians must do. First, you must shine; break the pitcher which conceals your light; throw aside the bushel which has been hiding your candle, and shine. Let your light shine before men; let your good works be such, that when men look upon you, they shall know that you have been with Jesus. Then there must be the sound, the blowing of the trumpet. ... Take the gospel to them; carry it to their door; put it in their way; do not suffer them to escape it; blow the trumpet right against their ears.”

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## PAUSE REFLECT

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Gideon said, "My clan is the weakest, and I am the least in my family." What did Moses say about himself in Exodus 4:10?

Do you ever find yourself talking like Gideon or Moses? What do you say about yourself that might be limiting you?

Judges 6:1 says that God "gave them into the hands of the Midianites." Why did God do that?

What was the first act of courage that God asked of Gideon?

Where were the Israelites hiding from the Midianites?

In Judges Chapter 7, we see God pare down Gideon's army again and again. Why?

Fill in the spaces:

Therefore, if any man be \_\_\_\_\_, he  
is \_\_\_\_\_: old  
things are passed away; behold, all things are become  
\_\_\_\_\_. (2 Corinthians 5:15-17, KJV)

What might the clay vessels in Judges Chapter 7 symbolize? What might the light symbolize?