

You Have a New Identity: Will You Receive It?
Week 3

In the Winepress

Gideon's trouble brought him to an unusual place of threshing wheat in the winepress. In the grand scheme of things, he was not alone, Moses and Esther found themselves in unfamiliar, unusual places too.

Survival often brings us to an unusual place that sets us right in the middle of God's plan. While these places may not feel good, God uses them to turn our hearts toward Him and passion sparks.

For some, the pressing of an unusual place may only last a short time. But for others the season may be decades long and lead to a series of unusual places. Joseph experienced a string of unusual places that all began when he was seventeen.

Read Genesis 37:12-24

What unusual place did Joseph find himself?

How do you imagine Joseph felt about ending up there?

Joseph's unusual place inside the dry cistern was just the beginning. From there he was sold to Ishmaelites who took him to Egypt where he was sold as a slave to Potiphar. When Joseph rejected the flirtations of Potiphar's wife she accused him of rape and he was arrested and thrown in jail. His time in jail eventually led him before the king to interpret the royal dreams. His dream interpretation and proposal for dealing with the prophecy connected with the king's dreams catapulted him into a ruling position in Egypt, second only to the king. (Genesis 39-41.)

While this place might be better than slavery or prison, it was still an usual place.

Which unusual place in Joseph's life do you think was the most difficult? Why?

Make a list of at least five words that describe how Joseph might have felt in the unusual places of his life.

Look over your list of words and consider your own unusual place. Which word best describes how you feel? Write the word below.

Look up the definition of the word and write the parts of the definition that draw your attention.

Use a concordance¹ or an internet site (like BibleGateway.com) to find Bible verses that use the word in the context of your unusual place. Write them below.

How does the Scripture speak to your unusual place?

What hope do you find in it?

¹ A concordance is an alphabetical listing of principal words found in a book. Many Bibles have an abbreviated one in the back, but more extensive ones can be found free online.

Stacy says:

There is one word that sticks out to me when I consider the unusual place I found myself in after the fire. It somehow infiltrated almost every aspect of my life, and often sent me searching for relief. Truth is I was uncomfortable, and while I described it as a physical issue, it was much more spiritual than I realized. Everything about my life was uncomfortable. My clothes, the bed where we slept, the place I sat to seek God. The smells, the sounds, the flashing fire memories all made me uncomfortable, and there was no escaping it.

Comfort is defined as *strength or aid, solace, a feeling of relief, to ease trouble, and give strength and hope*. These are all things I desired in my unusual place, and I leaned heavily on Scripture that spoke of strength and hope. I memorized them, read and reread them, and placed them where I could read them often.

I'm still uncomfortable many days in the unusual place I live now, but it's okay. Because my discomfort is the very thing that fuels the passion I have for the uncomfortable in the world.

Consider memorizing the verse you found that speaks to your unusual place. Write it on a notecard and place it somewhere you are sure to see it every day.

Finding Our Place in the Story

Stacy says:

I can't take credit for the words beginning with the letter P we are learning in this study of Gideon. They came to me through the teaching of Priscilla Shirer. Sometimes the inspired teaching of someone sticks with you, and God takes that teaching to a deeper level in you. **Prepare** it. **Present** it. (And there are two more coming.) These are not my words, but oh how thankful I am for Priscilla's teaching.

Now, let's return to Gideon's story. Gideon was inspired to take a step of discernment and prepare a gift for the messenger. He wanted to make sure what he heard and saw was really God. So he **prepared** his gift, which we learned takes **practice, time, and sacrifice**.

So Gideon went into his house and prepared a young goat and unleavened cakes from an ephah of flour. The meat he put in a basket, and the broth he put in a pot, and brought them to him under the terebinth and presented them.

Judges 6:19-20 ESV

Write down the next to the last word in this passage:

Gideon not only cooked the meal he prepared, he **presented** it to the messenger. He placed the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot.

Think about the preparation of the gift God is calling you to give.

What steps of preparation have you been taking?

What preparation will be needed to present your gift to God?

Once Gideon's gift was prepared he had a bit of a journey or walk to return to the place he heard the call. Scripture is not clear exactly what went through Gideon's mind and heart, but we can draw from our own experience.

What feelings or emotions occur when you've prepared a gift for someone and you are ready to present the gift to them?

What thoughts go through your mind just before you hand the gift over?

What response are you expecting? Why?

I can imagine Gideon's return to the terebinth tree was somewhat shaky. *Would the messenger still be there? Is it possible the meal might not be an appropriate gift? What if it tastes bad or he doesn't like it? If he's there, then what will I do? And if he's not, then all this threshing wheat in the winepress is driving me crazy!*

Doubt and fear can overshadow the excitement of the steps we take toward presenting our prepared gift to anyone. How much more God?

When it comes to presenting your gift to God what emotions rise in your heart?

Now, consider what lies at the core of those emotions. What are these emotions connected to?

Could these emotions stir because of God's plan and purpose? the one He's calling you to join?

Remember, God's work is all about: Redemption. Restoration. Resurrection. And His mission is not only focused on the world but also on you personally.

We need to remember the gifts we are called to give, to prepare and present, are all connected to God's plan to reconcile the world to Himself.

Read 2Corinthians 5:17-21

Who does God say we are in Christ? What is our mission in the world? Why?

Think about the times in life when you have become a "new person." Going to school for the first time as a child, taking on the role of student. Or what about when you became a "driver"? Perhaps, a new job, a role you might have learned from all your schooling, and it was time to take it on as your own. Or maybe when you became a spouse? a parent? a grandparent?

What steps did you take to prepare and present yourself to the world in these new roles? How did it feel? What emotions do you associate with these times?

How long did the transition take to feel comfortable in your new identity? What was required to get comfortable?

Carol says:

When I think about the calls God has placed on my life, the steps I've taken to prepare and present what He was calling me to do, there was a lot of fear involved. Mainly because every call has drawn me out of my comfort zone.

Being very introverted, I would much rather be on the fringes of the crowd, in the back of the classroom. But the calls I've received require me to be front and center: leading adult Sunday school classes, leading prayer groups. All very uncomfortable for me.

But in a desire to be obedient to God, I've stepped out despite my fears. Fear of what people will think. Fear of failure. Fear of looking like a fool. Fear of not having prepared enough.

My desire to please God overshadows my fears.

The calls God places on our lives to use the gifts we've been given will call us into new roles, require us to live out our new lives in Christ, not for our own comfort, but for God's glory. For His purpose of redeeming, restoring, and reconciling the world to Himself -- taking back what we gave away.

Write down the identity God was returning to Gideon in Judges 6:12.

Now back up one verse (Judges 6:11) and review the setting where God called Gideon by his Kingdom-of-God identity. Was there any evidence of Gideon being the man God said he was? Explain.

We serve a God who raises the dead to life and calls things that are not as though they were (Romans 4:17).

Knowing what you now know. And remembering the Metastory in which we live and the new identity God is working into us as ministers of reconciliation, consider the following questions:

What name is God calling you? How does that make you feel?

What true identity is He raising to life in you according to the call you hear coming through the current trouble you find yourself in?

How will your preparation and presentation of the gift He's calling you to give help this new identity come to life in you?

The spiritual gifts God gives us and the calls He gives us to use them are all about God and not us. They are all about coming alongside Him for His glory. And His glory is all for our good because He is a God of goodness, love, and mercy. We do not need to fear when God calls us to step up and be who He calls us to be, but we do. It's all part of living in a world full of trouble. A world at war. Not only around us but within us.

Meditating with the Psalms: A Prayer Exercise

David, a man after God's own heart, wrote many of the Psalms as prayers to God, and they are still used in worship today. Jesus prayed the words of Psalm 22:1 from the cross, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?"

Stacy says,

I tried to find sleep the night we left our home in ashes and found ourselves in an unusual place. The house was dark and quiet. All of us were bone-weary tired in every way, but I couldn't sleep. My mind wouldn't shut down and I didn't have one word to pray.

So I made my way to the back porch and began to pace. Step by step words came, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I lack nothing." When I think about it now it makes absolutely no sense because in that moment I literally lacked everything. Praying Psalm 23 that night infused me with God's truth in spite of my condition. Those words were exactly what I

needed to rest in the truth that as a daughter of the Most High I did not lack one thing, and there was nothing to fear.

Grasping tight to our identity in Christ is a daily battle between our own thoughts and God's truth. Gideon didn't seem to hear God's name for him in the beginning, and neither do we. Praying the Psalms helps us set our hearts and minds on who God says we are in the midst of the battle.

Meditating with the Psalms takes a slowing down.

Find your quiet place.

Center your mind on God. Take some deep slow breaths.

Turn to the book of Psalms in your Bible. Ask God to draw your attention to the Psalm He wants you to pray. Skim through the book to find one or choose a Psalm you are already familiar with.

Listed below are four Psalms Carol and I often turn to in prayer.

Psalm 1

Psalm 23

Psalm 136

Psalm 139

Read through the entire Psalm you have chosen.

Re-read the Psalm slowly, use each passage as a prayer.

Pause after each phrase you've prayed. Take a deep breath and let the words sink deep into your heart. Let the Psalmist's words become your words. If a word or phrase draws your attention, sit with it for a moment before continuing.

Invite God to reveal what the ancient words mean for you personally.

Prayer Reflection

What did you notice about the Psalm you prayed?

How did it speak to the unusual place you are in this moment?

What emotions surfaced as you prayed? Did they point to something deeper? Explain.

Does the Psalm speak to your identity in Christ? How?

Writing the Psalms on our Hearts

Psalms were not only prayed and read in worship, they were songs. God has inspired many throughout the years to write melodies to accompany the Psalms.

If you want to go further with the Psalm you've chosen, do an internet search of the Psalm to see what songs have been written with the words of your chosen psalm in mind. Or look in the index of a hymnal to find hymns that take the words of the psalmist and use them as lyrics. Learn the song... sing the song... write the Psalm on your heart.