

You Have a Gift to Give: Will You Release It?

Week 4

In the Winepress

So far we've discovered, in times of trouble, the need to survive drives us to unusual places. It's in these unusual places where our troubles turn into a list of complaints. We learned it's best to take our complaints straight to God, rather than grumble about Him to whomever is within earshot. As we vent vertically, God is faithful to listen. Then once we're out of words, He reminds us who He is and who we are in Him.

Reflect for a moment on the unusual place you've considered during this study. As a reminder, write down the place where trouble has driven you.

Consider where you have been looking. Have you focused on God? Or the trouble? If all you see is trouble, pause here and vent vertically. Tell God all about it. He can take it.

What word best describes how you feel in the unusual place trouble has driven you?

At the heart of our complaining is the desire to be set free from the trouble. We just want to move out of whatever unusual place we've landed and find **relief**.

How long, O Lord? Will You forget me for good? How long will you hide Your face from me?

How long will I harbor cares in my soul and sorrow in my heart by day?

How long will my enemy loom over me?

Psalm 13:1-2 MEV

The need for relief is so great we often go looking for it on our own. The world offers a multitude of ways to comfort our aching hearts and ease the burden we carry. But whatever the world offers is only a temporary fix, and in the long run may make matters worse. Nothing in the world will ever give us true relief. Only Jesus has the power to do that.

Where are you looking for relief? solace? Comfort?

How is it working for you?

Read Judges 6:2

What did the Israelites do under the oppressive power of the Midianites?

Read Judges 6:11

What was Gideon doing in the winepress? Why?

There are times the need to survive sets us running. We hide, avoid, even deny the unusual place we've landed in the hope of escaping the trouble God allows in our lives.

Hide is defined as:

- to put out of sight
- to conceal for shelter or protection: shield
- to keep secret
- to turn (the eyes or face) away in shame or anger;
- to remain out of sight
- to seek protection or evade responsibility¹

Which aspect of the definition of hide appeals to you? Why?

¹ Inc Merriam-Webster, *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).

While we may not be hiding out in caves, the culture we live in trains us to hide in other ways.

Consider how you present yourself to the world. When you think about your friends and neighbors, the places you shop, the strangers you interact with, what do you notice? How often do you see someone's pain written on their face? When's the last time you shared your inner struggle with a trusted friend? How was it received?

Fear of judgment keeps us from trusting others with our deepest darkest trouble. We conceal it behind smiles and save the sobbing for times when we are alone. We apologize when tears break loose in unexpected places, and when it all gets to be too much we hide out in the dark.

However, the reality is, in trouble's darkness our spiritual gifts come to light. Jesus is the Light of the world, and the manifestation of His Spirit in us is best seen in the dark. We can run in fear and hide the gifts He's given 'for such a time as this' or we can practice them and let them shine for His glory.

Is there a gift you've kept tucked away that God is now calling you to practice? What fear keeps you from bringing it into the light? Explain.

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.
Isaiah 60:1 ESV

Prepare It

*Gideon went inside, prepared a young goat
and from an ephah of flour he made bread without yeast.*
Judges 6:19 NIV

Gideon prepared his gift as a step of discernment of the call he heard from God.

We've challenged you along the way to listen for God's call in your life. Do you hear Him calling you to prepare the gift He's given you? Can you name it?

What steps of preparation have you utilized when it comes to practice? spending time and energy on?

How does this gift work into God's plan of redemption, restoration, and resurrection?

Present *It*

*Putting the meat in a basket and its broth in a pot,
he brought them out and offered them to him under the tree.*
Judges 6:19 NIV

Gideon prepared the gift for presentation and went back to the place he heard God call him.

What expectations are wrapped up in presenting your gift to God?

What fears are stirred when you consider the moment of presentation?

Gideon prepared and presented his gift to God. Now what?

Read Judges 6:20

What instruction did the angel of the Lord give to Gideon?

Gideon was instructed to put his gift down on a nearby rock. This brings us to our third phase in giving our gift to the Lord: **Put it down.**

There will come a time when God's inspiration has led us through the preparation and we stand before Him ready to present the gift to Him for His use. The presentation of our gift comes to a conclusion with the call to **put it down.**

We take a step back, lift our hands in surrender as if to say, "I've done the best I know how with the faith You've provided and in the power of your Spirit. Now it is Your turn."

Re-read Judges 6:20

Where did the angel tell Gideon to put his gift?

Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-4

According to Paul's letter to the Corinthians, who is the spiritual Rock that followed the Israelites during their Exodus journey?

Read 1 Peter 2:4-5

What simile is used to describe Believers in Christ?

Into what are they being built?

What is the role of the holy priesthood?

Oh sisters, do you see it? God calls us as daughters of the Most High to prepare and present the gifts He has given us. Then as we lay them on the Rock of our salvation, like Him, we become living stones being built up as a spiritual house. What good news this is!

What stirs in your heart when you consider what God is building in and through the putting down of your gifts on the Rock?

Is there any doubt or hesitation in the putting down? Explain.

After putting your gift down, what does it look like for you to take a step back and release it to Him? What is required of you in this process?

Putting it down may require more effort than we realize. Just as being driven into an unusual place by trouble stirs our minds with complaints, the process of preparing and presenting moves our minds to imagine how God will use our gift. We dream about the pay off for all the practice, time, and sacrifice expended.

However, the truth is, we may have a broad vision of what God is doing in us, but He is sovereign over all the details and He knows best how to take what we've put down and use it for our good, the good of others, and for His glory.

Gideon probably had a few expectations as well. He prepared and presented a meal. Something to be eaten in fellowship with the messenger. Isn't this the logical expectation? Yet, our expectations don't always align with God's plan. Part of putting it down is laying our expectations down along with the gift.

What expectations surround the gift you've been called to put down?

What dreams and desires do you have connected with your gift?

How have you defined success or failure when it comes to God's call in your life? Explain.

We must be careful to notice when our expectations keep us holding tight to the gifts God has given us instead of putting them down. Expectations about how God would enter and save His children is exactly what kept so many from recognizing the saving grace of Jesus when he walked in this world.

Read John 4:7-19, John 6:30-66, Mark 2:13-17, Luke 24:13-24

From the selected passages, make a list of expectations that caused those around Jesus to dismiss Him as the Messiah they were awaiting. If you know of other examples in Scripture, list those too. (Ask Holy Spirit to bless you with revelation as you read and discern.)

Those who embraced Jesus as the Savior of the world put down their expectations and followed Him to the cross where Jesus gave the most unexpected gift of all. He put down His very life to save us all.

Believers are called to do the same. Put down our way of living -- our opinions, our judgments, our desires, our understanding of how the world works -- and take up our cross and follow Him. We hear His call. Prepare our gifts according to His inspiration and present them to the Father. Then we put them down on the Rock. Trusting His plan and purpose for our gifts is always better than our own.

Then what? What do we do next? How do we know what steps to take or which direction to go?

Read Matthew 11:28-30

What does Jesus ask us to do?

Jesus calls us to take His yoke on us and learn from Him.



Photo by Paul Jai on Unsplash

He was describing an agricultural tool most were familiar with at the time. A yoke is a wooden cross piece used to fasten two work animals together. It was then attached to a plow or cart. A yoke works to coordinate the strength, tempo, and direction of the two animals.

When Jesus calls us under His yoke, He invites us to join Him in the work of building His Kingdom. Putting our gifts down is much like stepping into the wooden cross piece next to Jesus.

Take a moment to consider this literal picture in a spiritual way.

What happens when we take our gifts in hand and move ahead of Jesus?

What might happen if we refuse to take another step?

What if we allow our expectations to dictate which direction we will go?

When we step into the yoke alongside the Savior, we give him rule and reign with the gifts He is calling us to give. We learn to watch, listen, and even feel how to move and be in a way that makes the work restful.

What would it look like for you to step into or take Jesus' yoke?

How could it create rest in you? Your life? Your Spirit?

Thus says the Lord: "Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. ..."

Jeremiah 6:16 ESV

Taking a Sabbath Rest: A Prayer Practice

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Matthew 11:28-30

Notice again what happens when we take the gifts God has given us and enter Jesus' yoke.

What will Jesus give in return?

What will we find for our souls?

Rest is not only essential to our physical health it is essential to our spiritual health as well.

Read Genesis 2:2

What did God do on the seventh day after creating the world?

Read Exodus 20:8

What does this commandment instruct us to do?

Sabbath is a day of rest and worship. In the ancient culture Sabbath rest was observed from sundown on the sixth day (Friday) until sundown on the seventh day (Saturday). The idea of Sabbath rest meant preparing ahead of time by cooking meals and taking care of chores so that the time set aside for Sabbath was set apart for God. By the time Jesus began his ministry, Sabbath had become all about rules. A splitting of hairs on what was considered work. Instead of a day set apart for God it became another burden to carry.

In the gospel of Mark Jesus reveals the heart of the Sabbath..

*Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.
So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."
Mark 2:27-28 NIV*

What lies at the heart of our prayer practice for this week are two things:

- Sabbath was made for us, a gift of rest given to us by our heavenly Father.
- Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath.

This week our prayer practice is to set aside at least four hours for Sabbath rest. This spiritual practice will take some preparation.

Make a plan. Take a look at your calendar and set the date and time.

Ask God to guide you in preparing for this time of rest. Find time before or after to do the things you would normally do during the time you've set aside for Sabbath.

Prayerfully consider how God is calling you to spend the Sabbath. Will you: Read Scripture? Spend time in silence? Turn your screens off? Answer your phone? Journal?

Remember

Sabbath is more than a vacation mindset. It is God's gift to us.

Jesus, not rules of what or what not to do, is our focus during the rest.

After you practice Sabbath take time to reflect on the experience. What words describe what you experience? Journal your thoughts if you feel so led.
