

THE COURAGE TO STAY ON THE POTTER'S WHEEL

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Isaiah 64:8 But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand.

“Have thine own way Lord, have thine own way. Thou art the Potter, I am the clay. Mold me, make me, after thy will. While I am waiting, yielded and still.” We sing these songs. But do we give any credence to the words we are singing? Or is simply rote from the hundreds of times we’ve sung them before?

Psalms 119:73 Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments. Do we really believe in our hearts that God’s hands have made and fashioned us? I mean really? And are we willing to wait, yield and be still while God puts us on his Potters Wheel and crafts us into the image He has for us?

Staying on the Potter’s Wheel takes courage because it means we are willing to allow God to mold us in His image. We are willing to give into His competent hands, and His will. A potter, when making a vessel will determine what the vessel will look like before taking that lump of clay and putting it on the wheel. He will know exactly what the use of that vessel will be. It may be a coffee cup. It may be a vase. It may be an urn to hold the remains of some loved one who has gone on to eternity. But they know how it will look and what it will be used for. So it is with God. Before we were born, God knew what he wanted for us. He has our picture hanging on his refrigerator. He knows what our talents will be. Our life in His will is mapped out. **Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.**

The challenge for Him is the lump. Lumps have a bad habit of jumping off the wheel.

There is no question that God would have that every man and woman born on this planet come to Christ; **2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.** God would have that no man ends up in hell. In fact, hell was not made for man, but for Satan and his fallen angels. Mankind chooses hell over heaven. It’s a conscious decision. If you are here today without Christ, your first step is to become a child of God by accepted His Son as your personal Lord and Saviour. It is then that you will be in a position to be on the Potter’s wheel.

The prodigal son's father had a distinct plan for his son's life, but that son "chose" to get off of the wheel and go his own way. The results were disastrous. This is a clear picture of what happens when we, as God's children, decide to step off of the Potter's Wheel and go it on our own, to take our inheritance and use it for our own selfish purposes.

The question is, who do we think we are? Have we more wisdom than an omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent God? Paul has an answer to that: **Romans 9:20-24** *Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?*

Are we the clay? Or do we think we're the potter? Do we think it is our job to determine our future? That we are to mold ourselves into our own image? That we have more power over ourselves than He who created us? There was an angel called Lucifer who believed this. How'd that work out for him?

I want to talk to you about the difference between being the potter, the one who makes and forms the clay, and being the clay, that which is molded by the hands of someone else. For whichever one you decide to be in your Christian life will determine whether you will be submissive to God and have the courage to do whatever He wants you to or be stubborn and go our own way and do our own thing.

Just like there can many servants but only one master there can also be many lumps of clay but only one potter to mold them.

Let's take a look at that lump of clay:

By definition, clay is nothing more than any earth that forms a paste with water and hardens when heated or dried.

Since we were made from the dust of the ground I don't think that anyone would argue the point that we are that lump of clay. **(Genesis 2:7)** *And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.*

I learned a lot about clay when working with Maureen Dennis at Clay for kids. She taught me how to "throw" clay and use a potter's wheel. I understand what it takes to make something out of virtually nothing and how important it is for the potter to control the clay and not the other way around.

You have to have the right ingredients.

In order to make clay that is useable you have to start with just the right mixture of earth and water. If there is too much water in the clay and it is too wet it will not harden. If it is too soft it will be too weak to hold up and nothing will be able to be formed from it. If it is too dry it will crumble and break apart and will be just as useless. There must be a perfect combination of the two ingredients in order for clay to be useful.

Spiritual application: In order for man to live he must have a proper mixture of certain "ingredients" in his environment. Physically we need water, food, and air in order to survive. These are our most basic needs. We also need heat to keep us warm, light in order to see, clothes to protect our bodies and shelter to protect us from the elements. We must be able to sleep and eat in order to strengthen and nourish our bodies.

Just like we need certain "ingredients" in our lives for our physical well-being we also need certain "ingredients" in our lives for our spiritual existence and growth. We need to read our Bibles every day in order to know about spiritual matters. Why is Bible reading so important to the Christian? What effect does the Word of God have on us?

- **Knowledge comes through the Word of God.**
- **Faith comes through the Word of God.**
- **Salvation comes through the Word of God.**
- **Worship comes through the Word of God.**

Our second spiritual "ingredient" is our prayer life. We need to have a consistent prayer life so we can communicate with God. If you want answers to your prayers then whatever you pray for make sure that it is accordance with God's will. God will not honor selfish requests or things that go against the Scriptures.

Bible reading and prayer are our two most basic spiritual needs. God teaches us and speaks to us mainly through the Scriptures but He also speaks to us through our communication with Him in prayer.

Once the potter has all the necessary ingredients for his clay, he is ready to prepare it for the wheel. In the potter business this is called "kneading". This can be "painful" for that lump of clay.

The Kneading Process

Once you have mixed the right amounts of both earth and water the clay must be kneaded or worked with the hands in order to incorporate the ingredients or mix them together.

The reason for the kneading process is two-fold:

- You must get out all the air bubbles. Any air pockets that are left in the clay will cause the piece to explode when it is being fired in the kiln.
- Any grit or foreign particles that are left in the clay will create imperfections and cause the clay to weaken and to fall apart when it is being thrown on the wheel. The potter can feel these in the clay as he works it with his hands.

Example: How many of you have ever kneaded dough to make a pie or bread? It is the same principle. You have to knead the dough until it is easy enough to work with.

Spiritual application: In order to be used of God, all the junk, all the imperfections, all the sin, all of self, must be removed from your life. God cannot **use YOU** if there is still some **of YOU** left **in YOU**. We must have the courage to withstand God's kneading process. Yes, it can be painful at the first, but afterwards, sweet peace is ours. We must be willing to allow the potter to "knead" out our past failures, our fears, our negativity and insecurities that create defeat in our service for the Potter.

Only when you become an empty vessel can God fill you. If the Holy Spirit tries to fill your life and there are still some parts of **YOU** left in there then only part of Him will be able to fill you. Some of Him will still be left outside. You will not be totally filled by the Holy Spirit and He will not have total control. You will still be in there interfering and resisting and trying to be in charge. It just won't work. In order for you to be totally filled with the Holy Spirit, you must be totally empty of self.

ILLUSTRATION: A jar of water that has rocks in it. When you take out all the rocks you will find that there is room for more water.

During the kneading process the clay is handled roughly by the potter as he works out the impurities in it. At first the clay itself is abrasive and unresponsive but the more time the potter spends kneading it the more elastic and pliable it becomes.

Example: Have ever had to have a massage for a strained muscle or a sore back? It is the same principle. At first it doesn't feel very good. As a matter of fact at first it usually hurts. But as the person doing the massage works the sore area with his hands it begins to feel good. And the better it feels the more relaxed you become and the tension and the soreness soon disappear.

Spiritual application: If we really do indeed want to be used of God then He has to put us through the kneading process. If we are responsive and yield to Him then it will be much easier for Him and easier on us. But the more we resist God the more roughly He has to deal with us. It

is only when we finally submit to Him totally and willingly that His "kneading" of us becomes soothing and relaxing and we are healed in our spirit, too.

The Right Atmosphere

Once both the air bubbles and the foreign particles are worked out of the clay it must be kept moist until it is ready to be used. It has to be kept covered so the moisture stays in it and it doesn't dry out. It must be kept in a proper environment in order to survive until it is ready to be shaped.

Spiritual application: Until God is ready to use us we must also be kept in the proper environment. Once we are saved we must "come out" of the world. Now how can we do this when we have to live in the world? **1 John 2:15-17 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.**

There are a few things that we can do in addition to those we have already discussed. Attend church faithfully and fellowship with the right people. When you are with worldly people you will have the desires of the world. When you are with godly people you will desire the things of God. To be ready for the potter's wheel, we must live in the right environment.

Now the clay is ready for the potter.

The potter has a lump of pliable clay, fit for the potter's wheel. It's pliable, willing and desirous to be molded into the potter's vision for the lump.

This is the condition we must have to courage to have. It means giving up our will and bending to the will of the potter. I often hear the words, "I feel like I'm just going in circles in my Christian life". Well, DUH! Guess what, the potter's wheel goes in circles. And, the more we resist the potter's skillful hands, the longer He has to keep us spinning on the wheel. Israel chose their own will and decided to NOT go into the Promised Land. What happened? God kept them on the wheel for 40 years trying to mold them to his will. Have you succumbed to the will of the potter? Or are you going around in circles?

The Furnace of Fire

The last step is the firing process. The piece cannot be finished or used until it survives this final phase. The fire is needed to make the piece strong so it will last a long time. If there are still some tiny impurities in it that the potter couldn't get out then the piece will crack or explode and be useless.

Malachi 3:2 But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap:

There will always be a test. God almost always tests us with something that is very special to us or important in our lives.

- Job was tested
- Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego were tested
- David was tested
- Peter was tested
- What makes us believe we won't be tested? We must have the courage to complete the journey.
- Job stayed right, David and Peter got right. Where are we in the process?

Spiritual application: Everyone will be tested by fire. Some make it and some don't. Even the most spiritual looking on the outside can be flawed on the inside. It is a matter of the heart. If the heart is not right with God then the Christian will surely crack under God's firing process. What are you going to do? What will your test be? Will you succeed or fail? If you fail, will you stay defeated or will you humble yourself and get right and rise again to be used of God? The choice is yours. Don't be a casualty. Have to courage to allow God to finish His work.

The Final Touches

It is the potter who decorates each piece and gives it its beauty. It must also be glazed for protection so that it doesn't become marred or damaged.

(2 Timothy 2:20-21) But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.

Spiritual application: Our decoration is the talents that God gives each of us. He gives these to us to be used not for selfish gain but for Him. He loans them to us. It has been said that if we don't use the talents God gives us then He will take them away from us.

What talents do you have? You may not think you have any. But everyone has at least one. It may be an ability to pray. You say, "That's a talent?" Yes, it is. There are many things you can pray about and many people you can pray for. You may have the "gift of gab". God can use you to preach (men) teach or simply share the good news of the Gospel!

Now let me return to my original question. Are you the potter or the clay? Do you still want control over your life or are you willing to submit to His authority? Are you willing to let God be God? Will you allow Him to "knead" you and help you work out the problems in your life? Will you let him decorate you with talents and then use them for His service? Will you have the courage to let Him put you through the fire and, like the three Hebrew children, stand **WITH YOU** in your testing?

The Finished Work

The potter has several choices to make while he is working with a piece of clay. He can finish the piece he started if he thinks that it is responding to his leading. He can reshape the piece he is working on as he goes along if he feels it would be better as something else. He can throw away an unresponsive piece of clay if he feels that it is not going to come out the way that he planned. **Isaiah 30:14** And he shall break it as the breaking of the potters' vessel that is broken in pieces; he shall not spare: so that there shall not be found in the bursting of it a sherd to take fire from the hearth, or to take water withal out of the pit.

Spiritual application: Sometimes we are going in one direction, serving the Lord, and we come to a place where we have to make a choice. God requires something extra of us to prove how much we love Him and are willing to serve Him.

A few months ago I thought I was right where God wanted me. Good job, making lots of money, serving God with what I believed was all my heart, but God decided to put me back on the wheel. He wasn't through with me.

BUT ... settle it in your heart now. What will you do if God requires a great sacrifice from you? The Bible says in **Luke 21:14-15** **Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer: For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.**

In other words, know now what your answer will be so you don't have to think about it when the time comes. And be prepared for others not to understand your decision or to try and change your mind. Why? Because they know they couldn't do what you are being asked. And they also know that you will grow spiritually beyond them and they are jealous. But don't let these people stop you from doing what God wants **you** to do.

Do you have the courage to stay on the wheel? Are you willing to allow God to complete your journey? Or do you desire to continue being the potter in your own life?