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OX GOAD POTENTIAL

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What great feat can one person do with an ox goad? We wonder if anyone actually gave it much thought before a man named Shamgar came on the scene in the early part of the period of the judges.

The time was an era filled with heartache and sadness and ‘ups and downs.’ Because of the repeated idolatry of Israel, God sold them into the hands of the surrounding nations. When Israel eventually came to their senses and repented, however, God each time raised up a judge to deliver them.

During one of these apostasy–repentance–deliverance cycles, God raised up “Shamgar the son of Anath, who killed six hundred men of the Philistines with an ox goad; and he also delivered Israel” (Judges 3:31).

An ox goad? It’s a long, narrow farm implement, up to eight feet in length, fashioned of wood or iron, made for the purpose of goading or prodding oxen along. It isn’t made for war purposes. (We strongly doubt that at various soldiers’ gatherings, when men came together to compare and boast about their weapons, that anyone would have brought forth his ox goad.)

“Why, then, the use of an ox goad in battle?” you wonder. It may have been the only implement at Shamgar’s disposal. A song written by Deborah (a later judge) speaks of the “days of Shamgar” as a time when “not a shield or spear was seen among forty thousand in Israel” (Judges 5:6-8). A humble ox goad may have been the best fighting tool he could find. And use it he did in doing the Lord’s work of defeating Israel’s enemies. He used what he had.

Is there not some lesson to be learned by us in this?

What if every disciple of Jesus could be persuaded to, like Shamgar, take what he or she has and by faith put it to work for the Lord?

“Oh, but I’m just a nobody... I don’t have much ability... I’m just a one-talent person... What can I do?” Those are the sentiments of a person with a defeatist attitude, a disposition that accomplishes nothing. Sadly, it is an outlook that prevails in the hearts of many of today’s disciples.

My fellow Christian, look at Shamgar! Who can deny that his God-aided ingenuity fulfilled the potential of his cattle device? He is but one of several biblical illustrations of how God uses little people with seemingly little capabilities to accomplish great things.

SO WHAT if your abilities are nothing of which to boast? What abilities are?!

(Read 1 Corinthians 4:7.) The real question is, “What are you doing with the abilities God has blessed you with?” Are you an ‘ox-goad’ (one-talent) person? The Lord wants to know, and will someday bring you to account for, what you are doing with the talent he’s blessed you with (Matthew 25:14-30).

If we would be pleasing to the Lord we must throw off these debilitating mindsets that freeze us in place. We must with confidence believe what the Scripture says, that God “is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that *works in us*” (Ephesians 3:20).

Repeat after Paul: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).

Correct Me Oh Lord

Grady Huggins

“I know, O LORD, that a man’s way is not in himself, nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps” (Jer 10:23).

We are simply not capable of navigating our own way through life. God is the potter, we are the clay, and we desperately need Him to mold us (Jer 18:1-6). Trying to take control of our own lives has just ruined the original beauty that God had envisioned for us. “All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way...” (Is 53:6). God had a safe path plotted out for us, but we refused to listen to His guidance. We have rejected the narrow way for an easier road of our own devising. With the world cheering us on all around, we rush headlong toward destruction (Matt 7:13-14).

Yet, trusting our own instincts we are often blissfully unaware of the danger we are in. “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death!” (Prov 14:12). We convince ourselves that we have it all under control. Stop and ask for directions? Never! In our certainty we forget the warning of Jeremiah. “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jer 17:9). Is it possible that our heart is deceiving us? Is it possible that we are mistaken? Maybe we don’t have it all figured out and under control. Maybe we need help.

Recognizing we cannot direct our own steps, we must cry out with the prayer of Jeremiah: “Correct me, O LORD, but with justice; not with Your anger, or You will bring me to nothing” (Jer 10:24). Yes, we need correction. We need God to show us where we are deceiving ourselves. With His help we can stop covering up and minimizing our faults. We can rather expose and address them.

This process is not quick and painless. It is very difficult to see ourselves the way God sees us and constantly grapple with our insufficiencies. Yet, this struggle is exactly what we should expect traveling along the narrow way. And we can find comfort in God’s grace. He does not correct us in anger, but in love. He is always there to pick us up when we fall and strengthen us to press on to higher ground. Though we continually fall short of His perfect character, He has made a way for us to bridge the gap through Jesus (Rom 3:23-24).

The important thing is that we never harden our heart to His correction. It’s when we are most at ease in our faith that we are most at danger (1 Cor 10:13). We must allow God’s word to function as a mirror, showing us what corrections need to be made (James 1:23-25). We must allow it to function as a scalpel, opening up the innermost thoughts of our hearts (Heb 4:12). Like Jeremiah, we must pray for and welcome God’s correction at all times, because there is no doubt we need it.