

Jars of Clay - Part 1:

2 Corinthians 4:5-11 says, *“For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” and our lives filled up with light as we saw and understood God in the face of Christ.*

But this precious treasure (God's Message) is held in jars of clay, that is, our weak bodies, the unadorned clay pots of our ordinary lives, to show that the incomparable, all-surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. These bodies of ours are at constant risk for Jesus' sake, which makes Jesus' life all the more evident in us.”

Staffing a Weekend is hard work. And I'm not just talking about when we get there. I mean the weeks leading up to it. The preparation needed at home and work. The things I need to do mentally and spiritually to be able to come to the Weekend feeling grounded and ready to serve. I feel like there's always something vying for my attention. Some obstacle that threatens to distract me from quieting myself and coming to the Weekend with focus and in mission. The closer I get to a Weekend the more I have to fight my own insecurities and fears – am I prepared enough? Can God use me when I feel so _____ (you fill in the blank)?

The verse I just read (2 Corinthians 4:5-11) says that we are vessels for God. His light, His precious treasure, is put inside us -- simple, fragile jars of clay. Why would He describe us as janky, battered pots? In my pride, I'd like to think I'm more than a weak, breakable clay vessel. Perhaps a fancy vase to hold fresh cut flowers or a beautiful serving platter made of fine china? But there's a reason God chose jars of clay to describe us and not something stronger and more durable.

Recently, a piece of Indian pottery, a souvenir my parents brought back for us from a trip to the southwest, got knocked over. It fell off a shelf onto my carpeted living room floor. To my surprise and disappointment, the top broke off in 3 pieces. It had what I thought was a cushioned landing and yet the fall was too much for it.

Like the broken pot on my living room floor, we are also at risk of breaking. Life is relentless and God does not promise a life without suffering. He knows we will get battered and broken. We are afflicted in every way, He says, perplexed, persecuted, struck down, but God delivers us -- we are not crushed, not driven to despair, not abandoned or destroyed. God's design was that our weakness, our cracks and broken places, would reveal Him and demonstrate that all the power belongs to Christ and not to us.

Our Weekends are sacred, precious places where we ask women to come as they are, to share their pain and struggles, to show us the cracks life's tumbles have given them. As staff women, we too, are called to come deep and honest, with our cracks showing.

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Because our cracks are where His light shines through. When we are honest about our struggles, we reveal the treasure hidden inside, God's light and power, that heals and transforms.

God loves us so He put his treasure in us. But that's not all He wants from us. We don't carry His light for ourselves. His light illuminates the darkness inside of us, so that others can see Him in and through us and so we can share God's light with others.

Therefore, we can be confident, not in our ability, but in the ability of God. In His strength, not ours. In Christ, our weakness becomes one of our greatest assets.

"My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me." (2 Corinthians 12:9)

As I was praying about this time and asking God what He wanted me to focus on the song, "Broken Vessels" came immediately to mind. The song mixes "Amazing Grace" lyrics with God's words to us from 2 Corinthians 4:5-11. It's a reminder of the power of God, of His healing and redemption, His amazing grace. I especially like verse 2 of the song: "You take our failure; you take our weakness; you set your treasure in jars of clay; so take this heart, Lord; I'll be your vessel; the world to see your light in me."

Let's listen to it now...

Song: "Broken Vessels (Amazing Grace) by Hillsong Worship

(verse) All these pieces // Broken and scattered // In mercy gathered // Mended and whole // Empty-handed // But not forsaken // I've been set free // I've been set free //

(chorus) Amazing Grace // How sweet the sound // That saved a wretch like me // I once was lost // But now I am found // Was blind but now I see // Oh, I can see you now // Oh, I can see the love in your eyes // Laying yourself down // Raising up the broken to life //

(verse) You take our failure // You take our weakness // You set your treasure / In jars of clay // So take this heart Lord // I'll be your vessel // The world to see // Your life in me, oh //

(chorus) Amazing Grace // How sweet the sound // That saved a wretch like me // I once was lost // But now I am found // Was blind but now I see // Oh, I can see you now // Oh, I can see the love in your eyes // Laying yourself down // Raising up the broken to life //

I want to leave you with this quote from Dave Reid: "Remember, there is treasure in your jar of clay that can meet the needs of others. They just have to be able to see it."

Preparation (for email):

1. God wants to use you as a vessel of His light and power this Weekend. What feelings does this stir in you? How does that make you feel?
2. What might you need to "hand over" to God or empty out so you can make more room for God and how He wants to use you this Weekend?

Part 2:

Close your eyes. Listen as I read our theme verse, 2 Corinthians 4:5-11.

“For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” and our lives filled up with light as we saw and understood God in the face of Christ.

But this precious treasure (God’s Message) is held in jars of clay, that is, our weak bodies, the unadorned clay pots of our ordinary lives, to show that the incomparable, all-surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. These bodies of ours are at constant risk for Jesus’ sake, which makes Jesus’ life all the more evident in us.”

With your eyes still closed, check in with yourself...when you think about being a vessel for God this Weekend how does that make you feel? (*pause*) Open your eyes. (*share?*)

When I think about God using me as His vessel, I feel humbled, honored, and thankful, but I also feel inadequate, anxious, and curious. Is He sure He wants to use me? Will I know what to do? What could He possibly do through me?

God knows us better than anyone. He knows you intimately. He knows the unique gifts He put inside you and how they can be used for His glory this Weekend. He also knows your humanity, your suffering, your brokenness and still, He chose you to be His hands and feet this Weekend. What a beautiful calling – to be his healing to the hurting!

God has a history of using the least likely people to accomplish His will. Most of the “heroes” of the Bible displayed weaknesses – Adam and Eve, Noah, Peter, Rahab, just to name a few. God used tax collectors, prostitutes, and cowards to display His redemptive, healing power and He wants to use you and me, too. He’s not asking us to have it all together. In fact, when we are weakest, we KNOW we need God. We know we cannot do this without Him. Not in our strength, but in His. Our brokenness pulls us closer to God. Our weakness & dependency is how we will stay strong in God this Weekend.

Ann Voskamp writes in her book, “The Broken Way” -- “It’s the broken and limping, the wounded and scarred, the stragglers and the strugglers, who may know best where to run with wounds. It’s only the broken who know where the cracks are and how our broken wounds can be the very thin places that reveal God...and allow us to feel His safe holding hand. Those who’ve known an unspoken broken can speak the most real healing.” (221)

I read recently that humility is not thinking less of myself but thinking of myself less. If I’m not careful I might focus my attention too much on what I need to do to get out of His

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way and not enough on God. The beauty of being God's vessel is that I actually don't have to **do** anything but trust Him.

Proverbs 16:9 says, "We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps." Everything we do this Weekend we do **WITH GOD**.

You're probably familiar with Psalm 46:10, "Be still and know that I am God." Be still. Another way to say that is to "cease striving." "Cease striving" comes from the Hebrew verb meaning "sink down, let drop, relax" and in this verse it's meant as a gentle rebuke. God calls us to "cease striving," to stop trying to do it on our own.

Charles R. Swindoll writes, "If (God) wants us involved, He will give our minds clarity, removing any doubt as to what we should do. Our responsibility is to enter deliberately into His invisible sanctuary of rest, to trust Him completely for safety and provision. That is our best preparation... It is the Lord's job to provide the victory. He can handle whatever is needed. Our striving will never do it."

Sisters, let us stand strong in Him believing He is in control of it all. He knows what's best. We don't have to make anything happen. We don't have to worry about saying the right things because God will work through you. He is **WITH YOU**. His healing will come. His Light will shine. And what a gift -- to be God's shining Light this Weekend!

Let's pray:

*Almighty God, Abba Father, you are the reason we are here today. We stand in awe of you, having experienced your healing power in our own lives. We are so thankful you chose to place your treasure in us, fragile jars of clay, as vessels for your Love & Light this Weekend. How do you want to use me, Lord? What will you do in me? through me? Pull down any idols or strongholds, any pride in our own abilities. Help us to cease striving, to be still and know that you are God and you are faithful. Out of our greatest weaknesses, Lord, bring healing and transformation to the women attending the Weekend. And thank you – thank you for being **WITH us** every step of the way. Amen.*

Prayer Partners:

1. Get together with your prayer partner. Take a minute and ask the Holy Spirit to give you one word describing the light of Christ you see in your sister. Don't explain it. Just receive it and carry it with you into this Weekend.
2. On the back of the card I handed out, please write a short prayer for the Weekend. It can be a prayer of thanksgiving or surrender; it could be a request to remove an obstacle or fear about staffing. (doesn't have to be long)
3. Finish your time together by praying the prayers you wrote out.
4. Hand out the "jars."

Play the Song: "Broken Vessels (Amazing Grace) by Hillsong Worship