

Treasure in Jars of Clay: The Jars are Functional; the Treasure Never Stops Functioning

2 Timothy 2:1-13 (NIV)

¹ You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. ² And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. ³ Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴ No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer. ⁵ Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules. ⁶ The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. ⁷ Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this. ⁸ Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, ⁹ for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. ¹⁰ Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. ¹¹ Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; ¹² if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; ¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

As Christians, our mission is to share the unbreakable treasure that resides inside our jars of clay fragile bodies, telling others of our risen Jesus who lived perfect for us, conquered our sin, and clothed us with perfection so that they may obtain this salvation. To do this, means that we are functional jars of clay, meant to be used every day. But when and where?

After instructing the young pastor Timothy to be strong in God's grace and to entrust what he has been taught to reliable people who are also qualified to teach, Paul continues by telling him how to be a functional jar of clay: "Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer." (verses 3-4) Functional jars of clay are good soldiers for Christ. Because of our mission to share the unbreakable treasure of Christ and what he has done for us so that we obtain salvation, we are marching forward into battle for people's souls. But when and where do we do our soldiering for Christ?

Just two weeks ago, over 30 people, regular church going Christian soldiers like you, took a week off of whatever else they were doing to come and share the good news and rest that comes knowing that Jesus completed everything for us and covers us with his perfection so that we are perfect right now. God be praised that they did, that they sacrificed that time for relaxing, for vacation, time off of work, time to get projects done at home, time to play video games, to instead share Christ thus fulfilling our mission as Christians soldiers. Maybe that's when and where you can be a functioning jar of clay, but I have often bounced it around in my head whether that is the time and place for my Christian soldiering.

Soon after I first got to Layton in 2014, Pastor Mark Cares from Truth in Love Ministry set up an in-person meeting with me. He encouraged me to go out with them next summer for their two-week mission trip. I wish I could tell you that without hesitation I said yes. The truth is that I resented being asked to take two weeks away from you, from my congregation, to go and do mission work in cities not close enough that anyone that I would meet there would come to our church. Add on top of that that I had done enough cold calling door to door evangelism to know that it's not my strong suite and not something I look forward to doing, I definitely didn't think this was the time and place for me to be that functioning jar of clay.

Now, some people love going door to door. God be praised for them! We need you who have that desire to be functioning jars of clay by sharing the unbreakable treasure of Jesus with random strangers at their doors. How else will some people ever hear about Jesus unless there are Christian soldiers doing this? Eventually, when I got Truth in Love Ministry coming to Layton, I also went out with them door to door as a functional jar of clay sharing our unbreakable treasure of Christ. I value the experience and the conversations I had doing so and will do it again, but it's still really hard for me to make the time to do this in a place I'm uncomfortable with.

As I have delved more into the religious demographics of Layton, I see how many tens of thousands of people are lost right here and now and don't have the unbreakable treasure of Christ as our perfect substitute who completed everything so that we are perfect right now. That spurs me on to want to figure out how I can be in people's lives, be this functional jar of clay. Over the years, I've learned that I am a relational person. I like to sit and talk with people in small settings, not have brief unexpected conversations at doors where I feel I am inconveniencing people to the point where they are probably not going to want to listen to me. Then I heard about one of Truth in Love Ministry's outreach programs called "Please Open the Door." They help you invite people to come to your

house so that you can share our unbreakable treasure of Jesus. They mentor you for each visit so that you would have an idea of what to do and what to say. I started to see a time and a place to be a functioning jar of clay.

At first, my wife didn't want anything to do with it. But once the people started coming to our house, she and I both started to love these people and that furthered our desire to share our unbreakable treasure of Jesus with them. We were blessed with 6 months of visits with people through this program. Yes, we had to take time out of our schedule to do this. Yes, we had to prepare for these meetings. Yes, they required a whole lot of patience, compassion, and the biting of my tongue. Yet we endured it as we functioned as jars of clay. We kept at it with the same thought as Paul: "Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory." (verse 10)

You can be a functional jar of clay sharing the unbreakable treasure of Christ where you are with the time you have. A big part of that starts with simply being present, being around people, with some scheduled, unhurried time. Instead of being overwhelmed like me at knowing that there are tens of thousands of people all around us who are lost, we narrow our scope to the people who are present in our lives. With unhurried time, time dedicated to just being around people, we can learn about them by asking open questions (not yes/no questions). Learn about where they came from, their experiences, what they are going through, how they think about issues, why they think what they do. The more we share with them while being present with unhurried and purposeful time, the more vulnerable we become as we show our fragility and our weaknesses and our struggles and they in turn show theirs. Then we start to see times and places where we can share the unbreakable treasure of Christ with them, to give them hope when they are despairing, comfort when they are sad, a refuge when they feel like the world and their life will break them apart.

On a free morning when I was out in my front yard teaching my boys how to mow the lawn and making sure that they didn't cut off their fingers, I was kind of amazed that I ended up meeting and having conversations with two of the people out walking who live nearby. I learned simple things like one lamented not having enough money to buy new sunglasses to replace the scratched-up ones she had. The other expressed a bit of frustration and age saying that she had lived in this neighborhood for decades and couldn't keep up with all the new faces and that I would probably move so quickly that I wouldn't remember her name. (I'm hoping to see her again to see if I remember her name.)

So, where are you or where can you be present with dedicated, unhurried time so that you can be a functioning jar of clay to share the unbreakable treasure of Christ? Maybe you are already present with the people you bowl with, play cards with, go golfing with, go shooting with. Maybe it's moving the grill and the patio set out to the driveway or front yard instead of the back where no one can see you and then be present that way. I know one of our people goes regularly to a senior center to be around the people there. What about your kid's practices and games that you attend? How about going to the dog park at a busy time when you know there are going to be more people and dogs there? Maybe you can be more present with the people you camp near or with the people at the place where you get your morning beverage. Use the time and the places where you already are to be present with people, learn about their struggles, their fragility, so that you can be a functioning jar of clay sharing the unbreakable treasure of Christ.

The best part of being a functional jar of clay is that God has us operate with the time we have, not the time we don't have. We don't function 24-7. We can't. We're mortal. We need sleep, rest, introvert time. However, the unbreakable treasure of Christ is always functioning. God promises that his Word will never return to him empty but will accomplish the purpose for which he sent it. We plant the seed of God's Word, the Good news of what Jesus has done for us that he has made us perfect right now, and we water it whenever we share the unbreakable treasure of Christ, but it is God who is always functioning to make it grow.

"Here is a trustworthy saying: ... if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself." (verses 11a, 13) God does what he says he will do. Nothing can change his function. He's always working, never sleeping. If we have functioned as jars of clay and shared our unbreakable treasure of Christ, we can rest knowing that God will always be functioning to be that treasure in another person's heart. "God's word is not chained," Paul tells us, even when he, as a person, is, limited like us in the times we have and the places we are. (verse 9b) So, let Christ, our unbreakable and always functioning treasure, loose so that people would obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus.

As we function as jars of clay with the treasure that never stops functioning, the days will come when we get to enjoy the harvest. "The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops," Paul said. (verse 6) If you haven't yet, you will get to see someone come to faith. Someone will join you in a conversation about our unbreakable treasure of Jesus. Someone will step out of their comfort zone and join you for church. This will happen because God our unbreakable treasure is always functioning. Amen.