

PAUSE FOR REFLECTION

Do we really want to make a difference for Jesus in the world? Do we want our life and legacy to count for something of eternal significance? Do we want to stand before God one day knowing that we have fulfilled the purposes He had for us?

There's usually a nagging sense inside of each one of us that the world's problems are much too large, and we're much too small... which makes the biblical character Shamgar so fascinating. One small verse hiding at the very end of the third Chapter of the book of Judges reveals who this character is:

"After Ehud came Shamgar son of Anath, who struck down six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad. He too saved Israel." Judges 3:31 (NIV)

Tucked into this single verse we learn three things Shamgar did that resulted in his life having extraordinary impact:

1. He offered God his willingness
2. He used what God had given him.
3. He stayed true to who he was.

And... doing these three things... was enough. God used him to save the nation of Israel.

He was an ordinary person in an ordinary place doing an ordinary job. The thing that made him extraordinary wasn't anything external – it was his internal drive to do the right thing and to be obedient to God. The rest was God's job. The same is possible for each one of us – if we are obedient to God in the details of our ordinary everyday lives, extraordinary impact is always possible.

It was highly unlikely that Shamgar expected to be used by God to save a nation. When we take a closer look at his life, we observe several features that could have left him feeling like the wrong man for a "Deliverer of Israel" job title.

First is the matter of his background. 'Shamgar' is a name with Canaanite roots, not Hebrew. This fact has led some scholars to believe it's entirely possible that Shamgar was both Jew and Gentile. Since God had commanded His people not to intermarry with Gentiles, Shamgar's lack of pure bloodline from his parents could have easily led him to label himself an extremely unlikely candidate for a mighty work of God.

Then there is the matter of his occupation. Shamgar's use of an oxgoad (another word for a cattle prod) to kill the Philistines implies he may have been a farmer. A farmer up against an organised army of 600 men? Had we been in his shoes, we'd likely have been raising our hands with a few questions for the Lord like, "Are You absolutely certain You've got the right person?"

And we can hardly skim over Shamgar's choice of weapon – unlikely and ordinary, to say the very least. An oxgoad was typically used to prod oxen, not to wage war against an army. But since the Philistines would not allow the Israelites to have any weapons, they were forced to use whatever they had on hand. So, Shamgar simply sharpened what he had, and offered it to the Lord. God's Hand is never ever limited by what we have in ours.

So... do we really desire to live a life that has extraordinary impact? If so, there is much encouragement to be found in Shamgar's story. Even if we feel terribly insignificant, even if everything within us is screaming that we're not someone who can be used by God, all we have to do is offer Him our willingness, sharpen whatever gift, talent or ability He has given us, and stay true to who we really are.

God didn't ask Shamgar to be anyone other than a farmer. He's not going to ask us to be anyone other than who He designed us to be. Jacob was insecure; Jonah was reluctant; Moses stuttered; Martha was anxious; Timothy was timid; Zacchaeus was crooked, Thomas doubted; John the Baptist was eccentric; the list is endless... yet God used all of them to accomplish His purposes.

All we need to do is be ourselves, then watch with humility, as God uses our willing, obedient, ordinary lives to accomplish extraordinary things in His name.