

I recently read of a pastor who decided to visit the various S.S. classes in his church . Class after class encouraged him as he heard the God's Word being taught – that's until he settled in on the 6th grade class. After listening to the discussion, the pastor asked the kids if they could tell him who knocked down the walls of Jericho. Immediately two boys replied, "Pastor, we don't know who did it, but it wasn't us! Surprised at their lack of Bible knowledge, he turned to the teacher and asked, "What do you think about their answer?" The teacher replied, "Well pastor, I've known these boys for a long time since they were little kids – and they've always been honest. If they say they didn't do – then I believe them!"

It's hard not to laugh (and cry) at such a silly story, but the truth is there are countless stories in Scripture of amazing people that many of us have never heard of or just happened to miss when we were reading. Many of these stories are of great significance to our lives should we take the time to reflect on them. Quite simply – there's a reason God wanted these people and stories remembered. Many of these stories are of obscure people who suddenly appear w/in the Biblical narrative to be used of God in a mighty way only to disappear almost as quickly as they appeared – and then never mentioned again. Among those who come to mind:

- **Adino & Eleazar** – *2 Sm. 23* – Two of David’s mighty men – Adino killed 800 men at one time w/ a spear – while Eleazar fought so boldly against Philistines his hand wouldn’t open and allow him to release his sword.
- **Benaiah** – *1 Chr. 22* – who killed two champions of Moab and also fell into a pit w/ a lion on a snowy day.
- **Little boy who gave his lunch to Jesus** – *John 6* – He gave what little he had and God used it to feed the masses.
- **Joseph of Arimathea** – *John 19* – who at great personal risk/expense purchased the tomb for Jesus’ body to be buried.

This list could go on. It seems as if God enjoys choosing the unknown and obscure to accomplish His work in our world.

The man we’re going to consider today certainly fits into the category of obscure but significant people in the Bible

What we know of **Shamgar** is contained in 2 verses and a total of 42 words. He’s an unknown man who appears in Scripture, is used mightily of God, and then vanishes back into the shadows from which he came. Yet what is said of him reveals a man of character, courage, and commitment.

As you’re aware, we’re in a series of messages on OT Characters entitled, **IT Matters**. In this series we’re looking at those qualities/characteristics that make a difference in life. **IT** involves those attitudes/actions that shape our character and determine our steps.

In Shamgar, we're going to discover (3) life principles that matter if we're going to thrive in the face of hostility/danger.

I IT Matters – You START Where You Are

After Ehud came Shamgar son of Anath, who struck down 600 Philistines w/ an ox goad. He too saved Israel. Jdg.3:31

Shamgar is the 3rd Judge of Israel who incidentally **was not** a Hebrew by birth but rather was a Canaanite who became an Israelite by faith – **don't you just love the grace of God.**

As a **son of Anath** (Anath – Canaanite goddess of war), his name (*sword*) fit nicely into family tree. Interestingly enough, by the time we meet him, he wasn't a warrior by trade (and may have never been), but apparently a farmer as indicated by the ox goad. It's possible after his conversion he turned from a warrior of Canaan into a farmer of Israel.

What we do know from **Judges 5:6** – is the conditions of his culture were dreadful and terrorizing. *In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were abandoned; travelers took to winding paths.*

We learn that b/c there were no moral or legal restraints on evil the people were too afraid to travel the main roads. Instead, they traveled secret passages and back alleyways to protect their lives from thieves and murderers.

Frankly, Shamgar lived in a time when the people of God had wandered so far from the faith they had become like the culture around them. In spite of living in the Promise Land, conditions had become deplorable b/c the Israelites had abandoned God to engage in the worship of Baal/Ashtaroth.

Despite Joshua's conquest of Canaan, he wasn't able to remove all of the idols and enemies; and the temptation was too great for the Israelites to engage in immediate gratification. Thus, both the influence of the Philistines (Baal) and of the Phoenicians (Ashtaroth) took its toll on the weak-hearted Israelites – much like many Christians today who are driven to embrace the idols of our culture due to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

John Phillips lends a great perspective of the pressure and tactics of the Philistines and the Phoenicians on Israel.

Both countries represent the world. The Philistine method of dealing w/ God's people was by *subjection*; the Phoenician was by *subversion*. The Philistines had a *quarrel* w/ Israel; the Phoenicians had a *queen* for Israel. The Philistines confronted Israel w/ *Goliath*; the Phoenicians w/ *Jezebel*. The Philistines used *force*; the Phoenicians used *filth*.

The bottomline is Shamgar lived in a time of chaos. Morality was at an all-time low while violence and political instability ruled the day. The people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes – and things seemed hopeless and helpless.

IT Matters we don't allow our circumstances to determine our faithfulness or our success. **IT Matters** we have a realistic understanding of what's happening in our world and that instead of throwing in the towel – we get engaged.

Which brings us back to **Judges 3:31** – *After Ehud came Shamgar son of Anath, who struck down 600 Philistines w/ an ox goad. He too saved Israel.*

At some point, enough was enough. In the midst of the calamity, Shamgar took a stand. **He was a farmer who could not accept the status quo any longer.** Instead of excusing himself b/c he was an ordinary guy – he decided to do something about it TODAY.

Whether it was in one fell swoop or a number of encounters over time – God used Shamgar and his ox goad to take a stand for His glory in a time of chaos. What is certain is Shamgar decided that instead of waiting for tomorrow – today was the time to act. Instead of weeping over what was lost, he decided it was better to step out in faith for what could be gained. **He had a sense of the SACRED NOW!**

The **Sacred Now** is that place where there's a collision of conscience and conviction for the will of God. It's where God calls and you determine in your heart to stand up and be counted for His glory. It's when faith has had enough of fear and decides to trust in the salvation and provision of God.

IT Matters we start where we are and we take a righteous stand against the chaos of sin and immorality. **IT Matters** we have a sense of the SACRED NOW!

It was out of such chaos and degradation that **Wellspring Living** was birth. It was out of the tragedy as abortion the **Fayette Crisis Pregnancy Center** was birthed. My point – frontline, cultural fighting ministries are only birthed out of the collision of conscience and conviction where someone stands up and says enough is enough – I’m ready to be a part of the solution no matter the cost. **Start where you are!**

II IT Matters – You USE What You Have

Shamgar was fed up! But what does a person do when they find themselves fed up? *Too often we complain. More often than not, we hope someone else will step up.* Yet instead of standing by and hoping things would change – Shamgar stepped up and decided to use what was available to him.

So he picked up his trusty, handy, dandy ox goad.

Let me assure you an ox goad wouldn’t be the weapon of choice for any soldier going into battle. But neither were a sling and five stones when David faced Goliath or the jaw of a donkey when Samson faced the Philistines. Yet little becomes much when it is placed in God’s hands.

What is an ox goad? It was a *farming tool* used to guide ox when plowing a field. To assure the farmer of the ox's cooperation, he would prod the animals w/ this tool. One end was a sharp (spear-like) point, while the other was spade-like chisel used to clean the plow of dirt and roots.

Point – You don't need much to succeed and experience victory when your trust is in the Lord. **You only need to start where you are w/ what you have.**

I can't help but to think of Moses. Do you remember when God approached Moses on the backside of nowhere in a burning bush calling him to return to Egypt to confront Pharaoh about releasing His people from slavery? Do you remember Moses' response? "*Uh God... I think you have the wrong guy. I don't have what it takes to do that!*"

And what did God say to Moses. He said, "Moses, what is that in your hand?" (*Exodus 4:2*) Moses replied, "Lord, it's my shepherd's staff". God said, "That will do. Lay it down." And when Moses obeyed, God turned his staff turned into a snake. And Moses probably freaked. And then God told him to pick it up by the tail. And when he did and it became a staff again. That staff was the instrument God used to turn the Nile into blood, to usher in the other great plagues on Egypt, and it was the tool God used to part the Red Sea and bring about other miracles in the wilderness.

For Moses it was a staff. For David it was a sling. And for Shamgar it was an ox goad. I'll say it again – **little can become much when it is surrendered into the hands of God.**

What is it you already have that if surrendered God can use for His glory? Do you have an ability or talent? Do you have a keen mind? Is it a sin/mistake from your past God can use for His glory b/c it has been confessed and forgiven? How about a hurt or tragedy in life? Little can become much when it is placed in the Master's hands.

Other than a desperate conviction in his heart – the only thing Shamgar had to offer God was his ox goad. In anyone else's hand, it might have been a clumsy stick, but in his able hands – it was a powerful tool for the glory of God.

Here is what I know. Shamgar took what he had, surrendered it to God, and God used it for His glory.

IT Matters we offer to God in full our aspirations, abilities, ambitions, activities, and accomplishments. **IT Matters** we use what we have to accomplish His calling on our lives.

Shamgar started where he was... He used what he had... and he **DID** what he could **DO**.

III IT Matters – You DO What You Can

I think this is very relevant. Shamgar didn't spend his days talking about or hiding from the problems – he stood up w/ what he had to do what he could do. He was more concerned about pleasing God and returning the people back to the way of God than he was about living safely.

R.G. Lee who pastored Bellevue in Memphis, TN said: What the church needs is more action – less faction. More workers – fewer shirkers. More backers – less slackers. More praying – less straying. More burden-bearers – fewer tale-bearers. More tongues of fire – less fiery tongues. More zealous effort – less jealous thoughts. More love for the Word – less love for the world. More seekers of grace – less seeking for place. More holiness of life – less bickering and strife.

IT Matters we are more than hearers of the Word – but that we are **DOERS** of the Word.

Too many of us live life thinking only of what we could've been or should've done. We settle for lives of quiet apathy. We know we should be living for God and taking a stand for Christ, and even faintly want to do so. Yet somehow, we sit idly by and do nothing. Maybe we're scared. Maybe we're confused. Maybe we don't know where to start. More often than not, I think we simply get too busy about our lives that we find we have no time for the life God wills for us.

In Shamgar's day, when the Philistines began to oppress God's people, most people sat idly by and did nothing. But not Shamgar! He couldn't stomach God's name being profaned any longer. He knew God's honor was at stake and that one reason alone overshadowed all his objections.

Earlier I said we have no idea whether it was 600 Philistines at one time or over time. Personally, I can imagine it happening at one time. I can see Shamgar walking down a deserted highway at the end of a long day. He's been plowing the fields and he's dusty and tired. As he tops a hill, I can imagine him running into a small band of 600 Philistines. The army, believing they've got an easy target so they charge what appears to be an unarmed Shamgar. Only he doesn't run! Instead, he looks up to heaven and places his trust in his God – and then it is on! In short order, 600 battle-hardened, fully equipped, armored warriors discover the business end of this humble farmer's ox goad and the power of his God. 600 to 1 and the 1 is the only one left standing w/ not a scratch on his head. Why? B/c he started where he was, used what he had to do what he could do – all the time trusting in the power of his God.

IT Matters –we start where we are –we use what we have – and we do what we can do. **It Matters!**

Let me close w/ a true story of the power of starting where you are – using what you have – to do what you can do.

Video – **Josh Yandt – the Doorman**

Josh Yandt was a normal teenager going through a difficult time following the passing of his father. But instead of drifting into the noise of life and succumbing to the call of ambiguity – he decided to start where he was, to use what he had, to do what he could do – **AND SO CAN YOU!**

When you start where you are – and use what you have – to do only what you can do – God can do immeasurably more than you can ask or imagine in and through you. **IT Matters.**