

FROM THE MINISTRY OF



THRU the BIBLE

# Masterpiece

YOUR LIFE IN GOD'S HANDS

DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

# MASTERPIECE

## YOUR LIFE IN GOD'S HANDS

***The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying: "Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear My words." Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make. Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying: "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?" says the LORD. "Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!" –Jeremiah 18:1-6***

If you've ever watched a potter at work, you recall them bent over their wheel. In minutes of intense work, they transform a mound of mushy clay into an object of art. The only difference between the mass of mud they start with and the lovely finished vessels on display in the showroom is the potter's work.

Such is the picture of you and me in the Potter's hand.

When God wanted to picture for us what He is doing in our lives, He sent Jeremiah to such a pottery studio to create a living parable. The Bible says God is the Potter and Israel is the clay. We can extend the application to mankind in general and then further to men and women individually: *You* are clay on the Potter's wheel, as is every person who ever lived. I'm there, too.

This picture of the potter and clay is carried all the way through the Word of God. Paul writes to the church in Rome:

***Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?***

–Romans 9:21

Then he comes back to it again in writing to Timothy:

***Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.*** –2 Timothy 2:21

In this simple picture, we don't want to miss how deep and profound this message is. Let's look closely at both the potter and the clay.

# PRINCIPLE #1:

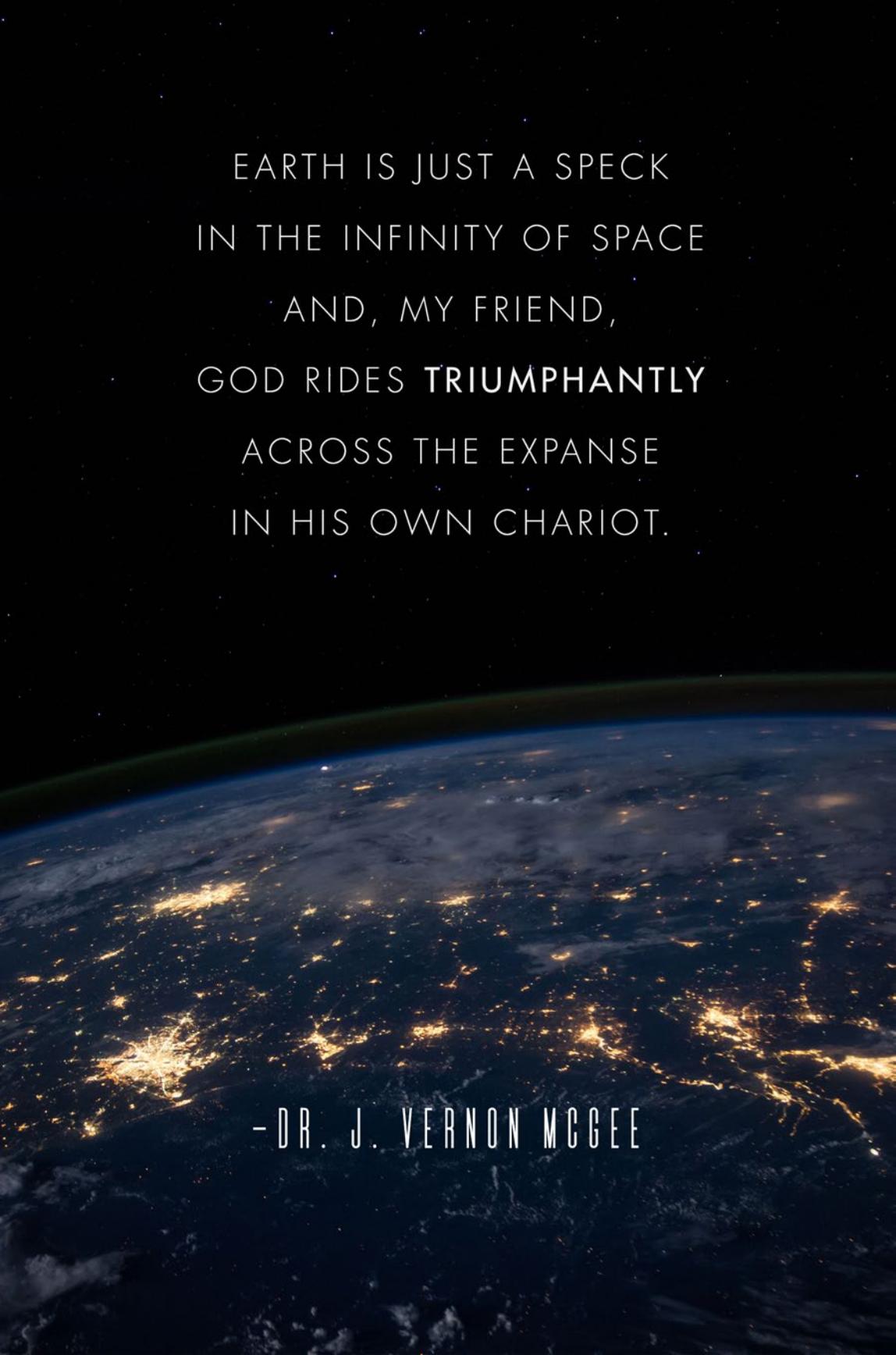
## GOD IS SOVEREIGN

Look over Jeremiah's shoulder and watch that potter at work. He pumps the pedal with his foot to make the wheel turn. As it spins, his hands deftly, artistically work the clay and form it into a work of art.

The potter is absolute. That is, he has complete and unlimited power over the clay. No clay can stop or question him. No clay can resist his will, tell him "no," alter his plan, or speak back to him. The clay on the potter's wheel can't even get up when it wants to. It is not able to do *anything* but yield to the potter's hand.

Nowhere will you find a more graphic picture of the sovereignty of God than this: God as the Potter and man as the clay upon His wheel.

Our culture often resists the idea of God's sovereignty because it values man's right of autonomy. Every group insists on its freedom—freedom to protest, freedom to do what it chooses. Today we permit murderers to plead the Fifth Amendment



EARTH IS JUST A SPECK  
IN THE INFINITY OF SPACE  
AND, MY FRIEND,  
GOD RIDES **TRIUMPHANTLY**  
ACROSS THE EXPANSE  
IN HIS OWN CHARIOT.

- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

because we must protect their rights. We permit students to deface their schools and torment their classmates because they must have their rights.

But what about God? Doesn't He have some rights?

God has incontestable authority. His will is inescapable, and it will always prevail. He has irresistible ability to form and fashion this universe to suit Himself. He can take the nations and do with them as He pleases. He answers to no one, has no board of directors, and no voters to whom He must respond. He is an absolute dictator. After all, He is *God!* He has never seen something you and I see every day: He has never seen His equal. This universe runs to please Him, and the rebellion of little man is a tempest in a teapot! Earth is just a speck in the infinity of space and, my friend, God rides triumphantly across the expanse in His own chariot.

***You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? –Romans 9:19-21***

As German expositor Johann Peter Lange said: *"When man goes the length of making to himself a god whom he affects to bind by his own rights, God then puts on His majesty, and appears in all His reality as a free God, before whom man is a mere nothing, like the clay in the hand of the potter."*

God is sovereign. You and I can be nothing but clay in His hands.

# THE QUALITIES OF THE CLAY

The great Potter—our Creator—chose to take shapeless, lifeless clay and form man from it:

***Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*** –Genesis 1:26, 27

***And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.*** –Genesis 2:7

Then after man sinned and God was forced to banish them from the Garden of Eden, He said to Adam,

***“In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return.”*** –Genesis 3:19

The psalmist wrote, “...*He remembers that we are dust*” (Psalm 103:14). Theologian and Bible teacher, Dr. George Gill, used to say in class, “God remembers we are dust, but man sometimes forgets and gets stuck on himself. And when dust gets stuck on itself, it’s mud.” Clay is a muddy mess—shapeless, lifeless, and inept, with no wishes, no rights, and no inherent ability. It is utterly helpless and hopeless.

Scripture confirms this. Although Paul is writing to the Ephesians, his words can apply to you and me as well: “*And you... were dead in trespasses and sins ... having no hope and without God in the world*” (Ephesians 2:1, 12). That’s man, all right—just lifeless clay on the Potter’s wheel. It is not a very pretty picture.

Perhaps right now as you read this, you resist this thought. I don’t blame you. Candidly, if I were told only of God’s sovereignty and that I am hopeless and shapeless clay, I would not only tremble, I would rebel! If this were the whole story, I would turn my back on God.

But, my friend, this is not all there is to it. This parable is like a coin; we’ve looked at one side, now let’s flip it over.

*God is sovereign.*

YOU AND I CAN BE NOTHING  
BUT CLAY IN HIS HANDS.



- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

# THE CLAY ON THE WHEEL OF CIRCUMSTANCE

***And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make.*** –Jeremiah 18:4

Turn your attention to the wheel under the lump of clay. To borrow Robert Browning's words, it is "this dance of plastic circumstance." It is the wheel of circumstance. Life's big decisions are not made in a church sanctuary but in the workaday world—in the office, in the school, in the workshop, at the crossroads of life. And that is where the Potter works with the clay—where He works with *you*, my friend.

The world seems to have no meaning. Multitudes see no purpose in life whatsoever; all is confusion and uncertainty. Someone expressed it in a little verse: "*In a day of illusions and utter confusions, upon our delusions we base our conclusions.*" How true that is of life today!

But look up for a moment from the potter's wheel and look around the studio. What do you see? Shelf upon shelf of works of art. Those objects of beauty were at one time on the potter's wheel as shapeless masses of mud. What happened? That lifeless clay was under the hand of the potter, and as the wheel of circumstance turned, he molded and made it into beautiful vessels worthy of display.

Look and see the thousands of varieties of shells on the beach. Anything God does He does in profusion. I have a beautiful little shell I once picked up on Sanibel Island in Florida. I happened to be in the middle of working through the eighteenth chapter of Jeremiah when I found it, and it occurred to me that the Lord was trying to say something to me. God started with just a tiny mollusk, and around it He formed this exquisite shell. If the great Architect spent all that time with a little shell at the bottom of the ocean, what about man today?

I'm sorry I spoke disparagingly of the clay earlier! It has marvelous capacity and resilience. This, my friend, is what our Potter wants—*clay*. He doesn't want steel, He doesn't want oil paint, and He doesn't want rock. He wants something He can put in His hand and mold and fashion. This is the stuff He is after—God wants to work with human beings.

Someone may argue this is too much of a stretch—that the distance between God and man is greater than that between the potter and the clay. I disagree. Actually, God is nearer to man than the potter is to the clay.

The clay on the wheel has no will. You do!

That clay cannot cooperate with the potter. You can!

I quoted the Genesis account of the creation of man for a purpose—God created man in His own likeness. He took man physically out of the dust of the ground, breathed into his breathing-places the spirit of life, and man became a living soul. The clay has no will, but you and I have free will, and we can exercise it. We can cooperate with the Potter. We can yield to His hand.

## PRINCIPLE #2: THE POTTER HAS A PURPOSE

You may have heard the expression, “He is the Potter; I am the clay.” That metaphor comes from the book of Jeremiah. Why does the Potter put us on the wheel? Why does He bear down on us at times? Why does He keep working us, molding us, shaping us? What is He after?

Go back with Jeremiah to the potter’s house. You won’t discover the purpose for your life there, but you learn something even more important than that. You understand that the potter has a purpose. Watch him—he is serious. He does not play with the clay; this is his *work*. He is giving his time, his talents, his energy to working the clay.

***Then I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make.***

—Jeremiah 18:3, 4



WHEN GOD PUTS US ON  
THE WHEEL OF CIRCUMSTANCE,  
HE MEANS TO ACCOMPLISH  
SOMETHING.

**HE HAS A PURPOSE.**

- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

Look over his shoulder; you may not know what the finished piece will look like, but you are convinced the potter knows what he is doing.

My friend, God is not playing with us today. He is not experimenting. He has *purpose* in how He is shaping us, and that comforts me. He has a plan, and He knows what He is doing. When God puts us on the wheel of circumstance, He means to accomplish something. He has a purpose.

The onlooker can't guess His purpose, neither can the clay under His hand. But someday we will know.

***Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*** –1 John 3:2

The psalmist says, “...*I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness*” (Psalm 17:15). One day we will be like Him. That's what all His work is about.

That's going to be a fair morning, a new day! God will be vindicated, because He is not being cruel when He causes you to suffer. Some glorious day, you'll see the Potter had a purpose in your life.

Recall what Paul writes to the Ephesians. It starts off doleful with “*and you...were dead in trespasses and sins.*” But that's not the end. There is more: “... *that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus*” (Ephesians 2:1, 7). In the ages to come we'll be on display, revealing what the Potter can do with lifeless clay. He gets the glory. It will be wonderful to be a vessel in the Master's hand.

# THE CHARACTER OF THE POTTER

My friend, look at the Potter very carefully. See His feet as He works them on the pedals—turning, turning that wheel of circumstance. See His hands as He deftly, artistically, oh, so intently and delicately, kindly and lovingly works the clay. He doesn't want to hurt it—He wants it to yield so He can make something out of it.

Do you notice? His feet have spike wounds in them, and there are nail prints in His hands.

*Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." And they said, "What is that to us? You see to it!" Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself. But the chief priests took the silver pieces and said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because they are the price of blood." And they consulted together and bought with them the potter's field,*

***to bury strangers in. Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the value of Him who was priced, whom they of the children of Israel priced, "and gave them for the potter's field, as the LORD directed me." –Matthew 27:3-10***

They probably did not know what they were doing when they called it the "Field of Blood," but I hope you don't miss it. This Potter is more wonderful than any other, because He shed His blood that He might go into that field, collect those broken pieces, put them again on His potter's wheel, and make them into another vessel.

If your life is broken, God is not through with you. He is patient and willing to rework marred clay. That is, if you will yield to Him. All that is necessary is the clay yielding to the Potter. If you look back on your life and think, "*What a failure! God could never use me.*" you need to understand one thing, my friend: He will work with your broken pieces if only you'll let Him. He already paid the price for your redemption. You can't make anything out of yourself for Him, but He can put you on the wheel of circumstance and shape you into a vessel of honor.

# » MY TURN

**WHEN GOD WORKS US AS A POTTER WORKS THE CLAY, HE HAS A PURPOSE.**

**Which way do you see God shaping you?**

- He is making me want what He wants**  
(James 1:3)
- He is motivating me to follow Him**  
(Hebrews 5:8)
- He is showing me how to be a comfort to someone**  
(2 Corinthians 1:6)
- He keeps me from doing my own thing that could hurt me**  
(2 Corinthians 12:7)
- He helps me identify with Jesus a little more**  
(Philippians 3:10)
- He grows my faith a little stronger**  
(1 Peter 5:10)
- He helps me be an example to others who are compelled to follow me to Jesus** (2 Timothy 2:10)

A photograph of two men, one Black and one white, smiling and talking to each other outdoors. They are both gesturing with their hands as if in conversation. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people and greenery.

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THE MOST  
IMPORTANT  
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A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a smartphone. The phone screen displays a list of booklets from TTB.org. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a wooden table.

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