

His Strength in my Weakness

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[0:00] They really speak to us. Let's go to the Word of God, 2 Corinthians 12, from verse 7 through 10. Paul's saying, The Lord says, My grace is sufficient for thee. My strength is made perfect in weakness.

And Paul says, When I am weak, then am I strong. Some thoughts about how God is strong in our weakness.

Paul. Paul. The name is little one. Paul. Paul. One of the heroes of the faith. Yet weak. He had the power of Christ.

He had his faults and failings. He had that thorn, whatever it was, that was troubling him in his flesh, something he was fighting with. But God's strength was made perfect in him, that human vessel.

Think about who God chose, who the Lord Jesus chose to be his very closest, his disciples, a ragtag bunch, weren't they? Some of them would have sort of been people he wouldn't have thought of.

[1:59] Why would he include them? Maybe labourers, outdoor workers like fishermen. Maybe they stank like a fish. Maybe they were a bit rough around the edges.

What about a tax collector? He wasn't the most popular man in town, was he? Working for the tax office. They were not trained or well-polished preachers, really.

Not maybe well-versed in the scripture, some of them. Not really highly regarded by the world standards. They were kind of people that were kind of on the fringes, some of them.

And they weren't the average kind of people you would think. Why would God choose them? They were just ordinary. Ordinary. God moved the ordinary to become extraordinary.

Average, everyday common people. Much like we are today. There's hope for us. Amen? That's an encouragement, isn't it? To think, why would God use me?

[2:59] All my lack and weakness and inadequacy. Peter and John, in Acts 4.13, they were perceived to be unlearned, ignorant men.

They were not the top of the tree. They weren't kind of the brightest in the bunch. They were unlearned and ignorant men. Uneducated, ordinary men.

But what made the difference? They marvelled that they had been with Jesus. They had been with Jesus. That's what made the difference. They marvelled. They recognised that.

Wow, that's what makes them different. And sometimes we can easily feel inadequate. Like, why would God choose me? Use me? Why would he be interested in me?

How can I do anything for God? What am I? But God is impartial. He's not a respecter of persons. He shows no favouritism. Romans 2.11, For there is no respect of persons with God.

[4:00] Now, sometimes we put people in boxes and categorise them. But we're all, the ground is level, isn't it? At the foot of the cross. We're all equally undeserving.

Equally unworthy. And God uses common people, just like you and me. What a blessing that is. Average people, just like we. Average people.

The ordinary common variety, garden variety person. Average people. And we see that through the record of scripture. It was the average people who became the champions for God.

Consider, as I say, the disciples. Ordinary fishermen. Ordinary men. Going about their everyday lives. Ordinary women amongst them. Then God got hold of them. And changed them.

He said, follow me. And they did. They walked with Jesus. They became extraordinary people. God says, my strength is made perfect in weakness.

[4:58] We don't have to get it all just right for God to use us. We don't have to kind of work to earn our salvation. None of that. We don't have to earn some credit with God so that he will regard us.

Just be ordinary. And say thank you. What a blessing. Just to say thank you. Jesus. You died on the cross for me. Thank you.

You don't have to use some big flowery prayer or some extraordinary language to talk to God. Just as was said before.

It's just being ordinary, isn't it? Just being yourself before God. God can use you where you're at. And he moves you from that to where he wants you to be. To be an extraordinary Christian.

God can use those common people to do mighty, mighty things for God. Amazing things. And as I say, it's one of those common themes through the Bible that who God uses is the common people to do his work.

[6:02] We've seen many examples of that. And we can all too easily have that thought, you know, like our two budding speakers this morning, they probably thought, well, I've not done much of that before.

We can think, oh, I can never step out and say something like that. Don't discount what our mighty God can do with you. What our mighty God is able to do through a vessel just like you that he can use to do God's work.

You don't have to be famous or rich or be good looking. You know, there's hope for me still. None of the things that are considered important in this world are necessary to do God's work.

We just have to be available, don't we? An available vessel. Some of God's greatest workers have been regular people. See, some of the missionaries and the revivalists and reformers of old, they were just taken from average, everyday lives.

You know, what was that missionary that went to India? He was a cobbler, wasn't he? What's his name? William Carey. He was doing a humble occupation of mending the soles of shoes when they were worth mending, you know, in those days when you would make your shoe, you'd renew your shoe leather instead of getting a new pair.

[7:25] He was just one of such a person, such a person as that. Just an average person and in his wisdom, God can and will use ordinary and unlikely men and women to build his kingdom.

Think of the many common people through the scriptures. We're just going to touch on some, just as some examples to think, wow, I could be standing in his shoes, her shoes and God can use me just as he did with them.

Those regular, ordinary, normal people, maybe even Aussies that God can use an Aussie. Wow, that'd be amazing, wouldn't it?

That he can and he does, he will. Noah, he was a man that argued with God about building an ark. It's like you could paraphrase it that God might have said to him, how long can you tread water?

You know, and God got a hold of Noah and opened his eyes to say, yes, yes Lord, I'll build the ark. David, a man after God's own heart, not only an ordinary man, but a very flawed man, wasn't he?

[8:39] And that's the good thing about the Bible, it tells us warts and all, doesn't it? Wow, they've got faults just like me. Maybe there's still hope for me, that God can use me, even me. Amen. David, a man capable of adultery, of murder, but used of God in such an extraordinary way as a forebear of the Lord Jesus.

He had just been a shepherd. You know, he didn't smell like fish, he smelled like sheep. It was probably worse. You know, he was one of the lowliest jobs of his day, a humble shepherd.

God used David, Joseph. Joseph started life as a slave and later as a prisoner in jail as well.

Joseph, he could interpret dreams and he saved Egypt from a famine.

He became Pharaoh's right-hand man. God used Joseph mightily to save his people. Hannah, she was just an ordinary woman, yet God used her as the mother of Samuel.

He used Hannah's faith. Moses, he was born a Hebrew slave, became an Egyptian prince. And he was another humble shepherd.

[9:50] God used Moses to lead his people to the promised land. God uses everyday people, doesn't he? Doesn't he still?

He does. He does still to carry out his will. Even such as the Hebrew midwives in Exodus 115, they did something that was at the risk of their lives.

they saved the boys that Pharaoh had ordered killed. Heroes of the faith, aren't they? That was just a humble role as a midwife, yet God used those Hebrew midwives in Exodus 1.

God says to you, my strength, my strength is made perfect in weakness. God has used and continues to use ordinary, everyday human beings, everyday people, and those who can say the most unlikely.

Why would God use such a person? They're available. God's power fills our weakness and makes up for it to do his work.

[10:56] Gideon, God used Gideon to deliver Israel from the Midianites, but before that Gideon was nothing more than a farmer, just a farmer. You know, he's one of those folks with a straw hanging out of his mouth.

You know, he was just a farmer. He was the least man from the weakest tribe of Israel. Why would God choose Gideon? Gideon was available.

God chose Gideon to lead the people in a daring battle. Rahab, who would have picked Rahab from amongst the crowd? Rahab, she was a Canaanite, so she was the enemy.

She was the enemy. What's more, she was a prostitute? Wow, totally out of the question. Why would God use such a woman as that?

Who protected the spies in Jericho? Rahab, a simple woman, a common woman, a sinner woman, yet saved by grace. Saved, transformed by grace, trusting God to save his people, to save her by his power.

[12:06] A woman acknowledged by God as a hero of Hebrews 11, a woman of faith. These were all plain, everyday, ordinary people, the kind of people God touched and used.

God in his grace can touch your life, can't he? Don't you believe that? He can. He wants to. Just say, yes, Lord. Thank you.

Use me. Jephthah was used by God to deliver Israel from the Ammonites. Before that, Jephthah was only known as being the son of a prostitute. Jephthah, he didn't have much in his CV to kind of brag about as to where he came from.

Jephthah, he was used by God. David, we've talked about, just a boy defeated a giant. He would eventually become the king. Esther, Esther, like Joseph, was an unknown.

She was just a Hebrew slave, just a kind of just ordinary. But God used Esther to save her people from being massacred.

[13:12] She was an unknown. God raised her up for such a time as this. Mary. Mary, why would God choose Mary to be the mother of Jesus?

She wasn't some famous actress or celebrity. She didn't have her name in the who's who of the day. She wasn't some great athlete. She didn't have her face on the front page of the newspaper. No, she wasn't a politician or some one of note. The mother of Jesus was a peasant girl. A peasant girl. Matthew, one of the twelve, wrote one of the gospels and told the life of the Lord Jesus.

But before Jesus asked Matthew to join him, he was just a tax collector. Some people you just think, oh, I don't want to hang around them, where they've come from, what they're doing.

Jesus took such a one and changed his life. Luke, another one, is just a physician, and God used Luke to write another gospel account.

[14:23] Bible heroes, the champions of the faith, just like you and me, people just like us, common, everyday, ordinary people. God chooses and uses such, and he still does today, to bring him glory.

God says to you, my strength, my strength, is made perfect in weakness. That's a great encouragement, and it's still true today, ordinary, average people.

You can become God's heroes. All kinds of people came to Jesus, from Nicodemus to the thief on the cross. What did he have to claim? Just a few words of prayer, a few words of trust, of faith, saved, gloriously saved, in his last breath.

There's many others we could cite. The woman of Syrophenicia, the Samaritan woman, Zacchaeus. It says the common people heard him gladly. He connected with the everyday people. They were eager to hear him. The Lord had that ability to see people, see where they're at, even the marginalized, the rejected. People others would not even spare a thought for, or utter a word to, or want to go anywhere near the lepers.

[15:45] Our Lord heard their cry, even the lowest of the low, as they came to him. One day the Lord Jesus passed a graveyard. A man came out to him, raging man, possessed with a legion of devils.

He was naked and savage. But Jesus did not pass him by. The Lord stopped and ministered to the man. He was gloriously transformed.

Ordinary, average people. people. You know, there's people whose names we may not even recognize. Just give you, I'll grab this from somewhere, some names we wouldn't even recognize, and there's many that are actually unnamed.

Heroes of God. Wow, maybe your name's in there. He hasn't even named you. I mean, if it was back then, you know, it could be someone amongst us could be in these pages, as it were, if we were back in that time of history.

People like Shipra and Pua, they were two midwives. Their names are recorded because of what they did. They defied Pharaoh because they answered to God.

[16:58] Bezalel, it's not a name you probably know, but go check your Bible dictionary out later. He was a simple architect to whom God gave the job of a lifetime.

Ehud, Ehud was a man used by God for no better reason than he was left handed and he was available. Maybe you might say, oh, I'm left handed too.

Maybe God can use you, just like he used Ehud. You know, there's hope for left handed people. There is something that you might have just for you, just like God had for Ehud to do.

Shamgar, they mentioned only once in scripture, still he had time to kill 600 Philistines and save Israel. His name is only once in there, Shamgar, used of God.

Asa, a son of godless parents, became a godly king. Tychicus, a courier who delivered holy telegrams. He had a job to do and he did it for God.

[17:55] He did it well. Just a humble job taking Paul's letters and running across distances before emails to deliver the message.

Asahel was a fleet footed sprinter as well with a tenacious heart for his king. Hushai was a covert counsellor for David who successfully infiltrated enemy ranks.

Scarcely known people yet used to God. Comparatively ordinary people, just like you and me.

People who the world would call, maybe they'd call them nobodies, but they were nobodies of whom the world was not worthy.

He says, my strength is made perfect in weakness. God uses flawed everyday people. You might think and say about yourself, I'm not worthy, I'm not able, I've failed God, you cannot use me, I've so many faults.

I like to say, Julie's got a very big thick book with all my faults written down. No, she doesn't really. She forgives me moment by moment, day by day.

[19:05] But if she was to record all of my faults, there probably would be a really thick book of all my faults. And we might say, I've got so many faults, I'm not worthy, God cannot use me, I'm disqualified, I'm unable.

Consider the roll call of God, God's roll call of God's imperfect heroes. I picked this one up, you probably heard it before elsewhere too. Noah got drunk, Abraham lied about his wife, Sarah laughed out loud at God, Jacob was a deceiver, Moses murdered an Egyptian, Rahab a harlot, Gideon was fearful, Jephthah made a foolish vow, Samson had serious problems with lust and anger, Eli failed as a father, David an adulterer and murderer, Solomon married foreign wives, he turned his heart towards idolatry, Elijah struggled with depression, Jonah ran away from God, Peter denied Christ, Paul argued with Barnabas, Barnabas compromised, James and John wanted special seats in the kingdom, all the apostles argued about who was the greatest, they were all flawed, failing men, ordinary men, men and women just like you and me.

We may sometimes discount ourselves as not that important, not that worthy, yet all of us can be activated to be about what heaven counts as a priority, to be as God's people, as Romans 12 talks about, fervent in spirit, abounding in the work of the Lord, serving him heartily, Colossians 3 23, whatsoever you do, do it heartily as to the Lord and not unto men.

And we can tap into the power of prayer, like Epaphras, another kind of someone you probably just flick past and not even think, here's Epaphras, Paul says Epaphras, a servant of Christ, he salutes you, he's always laboring fervently for you in prayers.

You know, there's some people laboring fervently in prayers in this church. Thank God for you, that's so critical, it's so vital, it's so needful. Laboring fervently for you in prayers.

[21:21] We need some Epaphrases, don't we, in our church, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. How can we be used of God? How can God get a hold of my life and move me to where he wants me to be?

There's a sense of zeal, of being zealous. And Revelation 3.19, zeal is connected with repentance. When there's that turning, there's that reviving, that refiring, there's a zeal connected with repentance. Revelation 3.19, and our Lord in Titus 2, it tells how he gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. Yeah. 1 Corinthians 15, therefore my beloved, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for you know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

God can take the ordinary and make them extraordinary. It's about that light going on, isn't it? That love, that fervency in spirit, that abounding, that serving him heartily, not out of drudgery, not because there's an expectation, not because of what others want, but because I want more of God. [22:49] He wants more of me. And you can move from being that ordinary to doing the extraordinary for God, to being zealous, to being fervent and fired up for God, because God still chooses the humble and the lowly, the ones others might disregard or discount, the meek, the weak, people with problems.

Wow. Me? With all my problems? Yes. You. With all your problems. People with failings, nobodies. Pick me, Lord. Let's be such. In 1 Corinthians 1, it tells us how God hath chosen the foolish things. Sometimes we've just got to be foolish enough, don't we, to just take a step over the line, say, I'm willing, don't feel able, just like our two young fellas did this morning, sort of a bit new to it, feeling a bit, I'm not saying you're feeling foolish or anything guys, but just feeling like, wow, I've got some rough edges here, I know I've got some improvement needed, I know I'm just a bit new to this and not feeling that confident, I'm not saying that to you guys, but just imagine it, when you do something for the first time, once do something that's a bit new for God, you think, oh, God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, the base things of the world, the things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, things which are not to bring to naught, things that are that, no flesh should glory in his presence, it goes on to say, hear that glory is letting glory in the Lord, God hides his treasures in jars of clay, you know, it tells us, I don't have that scripture written down, but how we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us, treasure in jars of clay, yes, your jar, you, me, in our humble vessels, in this humble vessel of, it's just dust, made into a fine looking specimen, but it's just dust ultimately, isn't it, that's what we are, and dust we will return to, yet treasures can be resident in these jars of clay, now sometimes the greatest treasures can be in ordinary pots, there was a Bedouin shepherd found a ceramic jar with some very ancient scrolls in a cave overlooking the Dead Sea, and he could not decipher them, he had no idea what they were, there's more scrolls discovered in the same cave, and other caves nearby, and the shepherd eventually sold three of the scrolls for about \$29, only later was it determined he had stumbled upon the greatest collection of biblical manuscripts found in the 20th century, the Dead Sea

[25:57] Scrolls, and those scrolls contained parts of every Old Testament book except Esther, all of them dated a thousand years earlier than any copy known at that time, an amazing treasure in an earthen vessel, you never know what you might find in a clay pot, the excellency of the power is of God isn't it, and you are containers of God's mighty glory, clay pots, fragile, easily broken, not much to look at maybe from the outside but filling it inside is that treasure that we have, that faith, that joy, Christ in you, God still uses ordinary flawed people, thank God, if he only picked those who were flawless, how many would he have to pick from, really, there's no one, as we've all got something, I speak for myself, some fault, and he still uses the small, the average, the weak, but most importantly, the humble, isn't that right, it's being humble enough, isn't it, sometimes we miss it because we're not humble, we're not willing to swallow our pride and take up our cross and do that thing that might be a bit unnerving, a bit uncomfortable, a bit out there,

people may count you as just average, but you can be used of

God, because we're all equally containers of that excellent power, the excellency of God, the power of God, and we're surrounded by heroes right here, right now, in this place, in this time, in this neighbourhood, in our church, real heroes, they come from the ranks of the common everyday people, heroes are unlikely heroes most of time, people like us, people who respond to his call, he says, you humble yourself, he can lift you up, humble yourself, he can lift you up, just wrapping up shortly, there was a preacher, he met William Booth, and at the time, Booth was 80 years of age, and this preacher knew the trials and victories of this man, and he asked the man, William Booth, what's your secret for success, and he hesitated a second and he said,

I saw the tears come into his eyes and steel down his cheeks, and then he said, I will tell you the secret, God had all there was of me, there have been men with greater brains than I, men with greater opportunities, but from the day I got the poor of London on my heart, and a vision of what Jesus Christ could do with the poor of London, I made up my mind that God would have all of William Booth there was, and if there is anything of power in the Salvation Army, it's because God has all the adoration of my heart, all the power of my will, and all the influence of my life.

I made up my mind God would have all of William Booth that there was. And the preacher went away and he commented, the greatness of a man's power is the measure of surrender.

The greatness of a man's power is the measure of surrender. Will you just be humble vessels, yielded? My strength is made perfect in weakness.

[29:50] He tells you today, my strength is made perfect in weakness.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you that you still use the ordinary average person today, and for all our lack and failings yet, Lord, we want to be such people as can be used of you.

Lord, whatever you want us to be, to do, may we listen and hear your call. May we act upon that stirring that your spirit does in our hearts today.

Move on us, Holy Spirit. take us and make us what you want us to be. Bless each one, Lord, we pray. Amen. Amen.