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Sermon Title: God uses the weak and foolish

Bible Reference: 1 Corinthians 1:27-29

**A disclaimer from Pastor Stuart**

*My role in the church here is to feed and care for God’s people the best I can. Key to that, in my opinion is teaching and preaching from the Bible; but that is not all a pastor has to do! In fact after the emails, staff admin, hospital visits, community visits, leadership meetings, etc, etc, there sometimes seems to be little time for sermon prep! Years ago I used to agonise over trying to come up with two, often three, totally original sermons each week. But I’ve found that, for me at least, that is impossibility. I’ve learned to be grateful for and to use the gifts God gives to help me – not only the Holy Spirit, but other Bible teachers and preachers.*

*Over the years I’ve discovered that if something teaches, inspires and excites me it’s likely to do the same for those I speak to. So I admit that sometimes I find myself depending heavily on other people’s ideas, at least to ‘prime the pump’ and therefore I claim originality for very little in these sermons. If you look hard enough and wide enough you’ll probably find who I’ve been reading and learning from! I never knowingly plagiarise, but if you find I have, then I apologise. It must have been that what was said was just too good not to use!*

*I am particularly indebted to the likes of John Piper, Sam Storms, Wayne Grudem, John Ortberg & Rick Warren. The Lord regularly uses them to get my spiritual pulse racing. I’m also indebted to many who kindly make their sermons available on the likes of sermoncentral.com and preachingtoday.com. Others who help me include ‘The Doctor’ (Martyn Lloyd-Jones), C.H Spurgeon and any of the Puritans.*

*These sermons are not made available because I think they’re good but in the hope and with the prayer that they may be used by the Holy Spirit to bless others as they have blessed our own church here in Ipswich, UK.*

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But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. 1 Corinthians 1:27-29

‘Imposter syndrome’ – or the sense that we’re in a place or position where we don’t belong or deserve to be. Big sense of fear that one day you’ll be found out, that one day people will realise that you’re not as good as they think you are! It’s common and it’s crippling, with all sorts of consequences. Eg: unwillingness to take risks, unwillingness to try new things; sometimes people over work to try to cover perceived weakness – for the last thing they can do is to seem to fail – so they will do anything necessary to ensure that they don’t! May shy away from taking responsibility – will always defer to another person.

If you’ve ever had/have it you’ll know what I’m talking about! I admit it’s something that I struggled with for many years, and still sometimes do when I get involved in something new or out of my comfort zone!

For all these reasons I have long loved these verses in 1 Corinthians 1. For me these have been some of the most verses in the Bible for my ministry. That God could use an ordinary country boy, the son of a farm labourer, who didn’t exactly excel at school is a wonder! I have often felt foolish and I’ve made plenty of mistakes, and sinned and to my shame grieved the H/S with my sin. So for God to call me to be his child is wonderful enough; but then to ask me to serve him in his church has been a scary thing, that sat/sits uneasily at times! But when doubts and fears have arisen these have been my own fall-back verses, as they remind me that God can use someone even like me! And I want them to encourage you tonight and this year also.

**There is a healthy and unhealthy (false) humility.**

* Healthy humility is when we’re like Jesus and willing to take the towel and serve others regardless of who they are and regardless of the cost to ourselves.
* Unhealthy humility is really little more than doubt & fear which causes us to rule ourselves out from ever being used by God – he couldn’t possibly use someone like me! That may be a noble sentiment but finds no basis in the Bible – in fact it’s quite contrary to what it says!

The very clear evidence and stated truth is that it is actually just those people, the weak, the unspectacular, the ordinary that he uses – the people that others write off as to small, insignificant, weak or ordinary. This is the beauty of God’s kingdom.

We must NOT make the mistake of thinking we need to be different/well/strong before God can use you

Sometimes our prayers betray our forgetfulness of this beautiful truth. We tend to pray for ourselves or others *‘Lord make me/them strong’, ‘Lord make them well’* – which have the unspoken connotation that people need to be physically/mentally strong and well to be used by the Lord.

Truth is very different – it is exactly the weak and dependent people that he uses. Our prayers for strength reveal a danger that as long as we’re well/strong we can do the work of the Lord ourselves.

Even the gt Ap Paul made this mistake. He’d got something wrong with him which he thought was hindering his usefulness for God, some weakness (may have been bad eyesight, may have been a bit of perceived arrogance – he pleaded with the Lord to remove it; he thought he’d be more effective without this thing, whatever it was.

God’s answer *’No, I’ll let you stay weak! I’ll let you stay weak because my power is made perfect in weakness.’*. He was saying that *‘if you’re strong you’ll try to do it in your own strength, depending on your own skills, experience, etc’*. No, I’ll keep you weak so that you depend on me.

**Our prayer then should not so much to be made strong but for him to show us our weakness so that we depend on him.**

I want to encourage you therefore not to pray for a change of character or circumstances so you can serve him better, but to **embrace what you are and yield yourself over and ask him to use you as you are and to work through you with his strength**. Say like Samuel *‘Here I am Lord, use me’* – and then trust him to do it!

We must understand that bad circumstances are no bar to God using us! History and even now we see this as God is working most powerfully in places where it is hardest to be a Xian – N Korea, Iran, China

Simple truth is that God doesn’t make mistakes – we may wish he did things differently in our lives, but he doesn’t make mistakes. Job’s story in the Bible is pretty well known. He wrestled mightily with the whys and wherefores, and his well-meaning, do gooding but theologically inept, so called friends did little to help him! His struggles are brutally honest, and he certainly made some mistakes as he wrestled with what God was doing.

But crucially through it all he held onto what he knew of God. In one place he said *‘Though he kill me, yet will I praise him’,* and another – amidst his confusion he affirms and holds onto the fact that ***‘He knows the way that I take’.* Job 23:10**.

What does he mean by this? Job may not know or understand the reasons behind the circumstances that had overwhelmed him but God most certainly did! He knew, he knew where Job was and what was happening. Job had no idea why God hadn’t acted, why He allowed him to remain so destitute and weak, but God did. He knows the way I take! Likewise, your circumstances, your condition are no mystery to God and crucially neither are they a hinderance for him to use us.

Vital truth to hold onto – he knows the way I take! He knows you are weak, he knows you don’t have much human influence, he knows the struggles and imperfections, he knows your past and the scars of sins and regrets you carry – he knows the way you’ve taken, the way you take – but he still wants to use you, weak and apparently insignificant as you may be.

There are numerous examples of God using weak, small insignificant things to do extraordinary things for Him.

* **Josh 6** – **rams horns** and the walls fell down. Maybe you’re a rams horn!
* **Judges 3**:31 – An **ox goad,** an impliement used to prod oxen along was all God needed in the hand of his servant Shamgar to kill 600 men in a day and bring relief for his people
* **Judges 6-8** – In the time of Gideon, when the men had been whittled down to a relative handful, led by a previously scared and timid Gideon all God needed was the **blast of a trumpet,** some **broken jars** and a huge shout from the 200 or so poorly equipped army. The huge Midianate army fled in fear.
* **Judges 15** – Samson floored 1000 philistines with a **plain old jawbone from a dead donkey!**
* **1 Sam 17** – And **one small stone** was all it took to bring giant Goliath crashing down

Small things, in the hands of ordinary people but people empowered by the H/S was all it took.

These are here for our encouragement. Small and ordinary – but who knows what God can do in and through us. And we have a huge advantage over those I’ve just mentioned. Each of us have the H/S living in us continually. They had to wait for him to come, we don’t. He lives in each of us. **Ephesians 1:19-20** -*I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God’s power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power****20****that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honour at God’s right hand* …’

**This isn’t about us being able to do anything – this is about God being able to do anything through us.** God encourages us in all this not to limit what he might do in and through us; he encourages us not to think ‘*well, I’m just little me, I can’t do anything, no one will take notice of me’* he would say ‘*Open your mouth and I will fill it*! His is the power, often we just need to be willing to speak and do so that he can work.

So let us not ask to be strong so we can work, lets accept and welcome our weakness and then seek His power to work though us.