

Upside Down Kingdom

1. A Wonderful Tragedy - Die to Live
2. A Glamorous Beggar - Embrace Poverty to get Rich
3. A Renowned Insignificant - Lower yourself to get Higher
4. A Successful Failure - Lose to Win

Last week we looked at what it looks like to be a successful failure. I used two stories to make my points:

The story of two athletes who ran the 5000m race in the 2016 Rio Olympics: Nikki Hamblin and Abbey D'Agostino.

And the story of a landowner and workers he went to the marketplace early in the morning to choose workers for his vineyard.

I am sure it looked very much like a scene out of my childhood when a bunch of us kids attempted to have a pick-up game of baseball, or football, or kickball. First, we would choose team captains and they would choose a team player one by one until we had our teams.

Of course, some of the kids were jumping around saying pick Me, pick Me! Others who were known to be really good players tried to play it cool. And then there were us kids who weren't as good, quietly waiting to get picked – hoping you weren't the last one. ***How embarrassing. I know we can all imagine what that must have felt like.***

But now I want you to imagine that you were one of the captains choosing. It isn't the kind of game you want to lose this time cause the losers have to buy ice cream for the winners!

So, you have to choose the right people. A lot is riding on this game. You only have 50 cents in your pocket.

Who would you choose? What would be the criteria behind your selections?

Strong, fast, skilled, people who hustle or work hard, easy to work?

Probably the same criteria you would use to pick employees, if you own a business. Those are the things I would be looking for too!

But as we look at this counter-intuitive upside-down kingdom Jesus was assembling, who do you think He would choose to use?

Well, as we are going to see this week. He will 9 times out of 10 chose...

5. A Robust Weakling – The Art of Accepting Weakness to be Strong

Have you ever felt like YOU were just too broken, too weak, too dumb or too flawed for God to use? Well, I've felt that many times and I still do!

If you've been wanting to enter into a relationship with God or you already have a relationship with Him and want to serve Him, but you wonder if you're just too much of a mess for Him, **then this message is for you!**

History has shown that God uses broken people, flawed people, the weak people and the not so influential in this world, to achieve great things!

We all seem to fall into the trap, however, of comparing ourselves and others to people we think are better, or stronger, or smarter, or more influential.

We think that the people we know who SEEM to have a deep vibrant walk with God all lead these wonderful, God-filled lives of perfection, with perfect marriages, perfect kids, perfect friends, with baby cherubs floating above their heads in the clouds playing heavenly music with harps.

It makes us wonder how is God ever going to want us or use us in his ministry.

I often think, *"Lord, who am I to give other people encouragement or advice or teach anyone anything when I have so many flaws in my own life and have messed up so many times in in my own marriage, with my own kids, and with my friends?"*

I know I have disappointed God on a number of occasions when I knew full well what He wanted but I did what suited me instead – and then went whining to Him to get me out of my mess.

I have never felt like I had my act together enough to say, Me Lord, Me Lord, Pick Me to do that cause I'm your man!

Yes, you all know full well that God uses the flawed – you come here every Sunday to listen to me. Yes, you've read the stories in the Bible. He's done it throughout history, but surely He didn't mean **YOU!** *Anyone but YOU, right?*

Listen: God Uses Broken, Flawed, and Weak People. And He Handpicked You!

It is BECAUSE of the mistakes you have made that He can and wants to use you. Not in spite of them but because of them!”

God uses those of us who are flawed, who are weak, YOU and I, because it's that weakness and brokenness and those flaws that give you a voice to reach those people around you who maybe feel like THEY don't measure up too.

Those that maybe feel that their mistakes and even sins, render them unusable or that they are too far gone to have a relationship with Him!

So God chooses US, as messed up as we have been and are, to confound the messed up!

1 Corinthians 1:26-29 NIV, *“Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.”* (Paul's trying to be nice – but then he says what he really thinks) *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** (you're nuthin')—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.”*

None of us should be going around thinking or saying how good we are! Or how Good we are cause we have a relationship with God! It isn't a gospel story that is about us. Our brokenness qualifies us to let us speak so that people would see God through our cracks at work. I love this next passage; one of my favorites!

2 Corinthians 4:6 -12 NIV, *“For God, who said, “Let light shine **out of darkness**,” made his light shine **in our hearts** to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory **displayed in the face of Christ**. 7 But we have this treasure in **jars of clay** to show that **this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us**. 8 We are **hard pressed** on every side, but not crushed; **perplexed**, but not in despair; 9 **persecuted**, but not abandoned; **struck down**, but not destroyed. 10 **We always carry** around **in our body the death of Jesus**, so that the life of Jesus may also be **revealed in our body**. 11 For we who are alive are always **being given over to death** for Jesus' sake, so that his **life may also be revealed in our mortal body**. 12 So then, death is at work in us, **but life is at work in you**.”*

God Uses Broken People, Like Broken Vessels, you feel hard-pressed by life, perplexed by circumstances, made fun of by your peers, wounded by your enemies, suffering with an illness, or even facing death, BUT God has chosen you TO reveal His Glory through Jesus living in and through you.

By His power and strength living in us He keeps the suffering in our lives from **crushing** us, or **destroying** us, or making us **despair**. We're **not alone**, we haven't been **abandoned**. He is powerfully filling in the cracks (with a wax) that keeps us together but allows His light to shine through. That's what others see. Broken people miraculously holding together under pressure because they're held securely in the potter's hands.

He has faithfully done this for His people throughout history. The Lord explained this to the prophet Jeremiah who lived 650 years before Jesus...

In Jeremiah 18:1-6 NIV, *"This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: "Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message." So, I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him. **Then the word** of the Lord came to me. He said, "Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?" declares the Lord. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel."*

You see, in the Bible, God did not choose people who were perfect! Israel was flawed and that should encourage us, because we're flawed too.

Throughout the Bible, God uses the weak, the insignificant and the imperfect.

He used Gideon against the Midianites

The Midianites would wait the very moment the harvest was ripe and come down out of the mountains and steal Israel's harvest. It was devastating to the nation because the Midianites looted many of the livestock too so they were often hungry and living in constant fear of being invaded.

It was under these circumstances **God spoke this to Gideon**,
"The Lord is with you, mighty warrior." Judge 6:12 NIV

I can imagine Gideon looking over his shoulder and thinking,
"Who is He talking to? You talking to me?"

I say this because of **Gideon's response**...

*"Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." The Lord answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive." Gideon replied, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me." **Judges 6:15-17 NIV***

That's the whole idea of God using the weak or the less likely is that; He receives the glory.

In the same way, God used a young greenhorn named David against a Giant Seasoned Warrior name Goliath

Everyone must have thought David was insane as they watched little David with a bag of stones take on this giant of a man who was as fully equipped with an iron shield, armor, and a steel javelin.

Even King Saul thought David needed some help to appear somewhat like a challenger. So he offered him his armor but David was so small it fell off him.

The Philistine forces were laughing their heads off as David ran out to meet their champion. *"Hey, this war is over...Goliath can't lose – it's back home early to mamma for supper baby."*

David knew something the others didn't know. He knew that God was with him and that He would fight for him.

David said to Goliath, *"You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. **This very day** I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands."* (1 Samuel 17:45-47).

Look, the same story is repeated **all through the Bible**. It was true in the case of **Joseph versus Pharaoh, Moses versus Pharaoh, Daniel versus Babylon**. And let's face it, in the case of **Jesus's disciples** they were just a band of broken misfits **against a powerful religious system and Rome**.

God chose arrogant, big-mouthed opinionated fishermen (who remind me a lot of me at times), He chose a King who committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had her husband killed to cover up his sin, He chose a Hebrew slave lover with a speech impediment, He chose a prostitute, He chose a persecutor of Christians He chose a tax collector...and on and on.

He Chooses the Least Likely _ He chose Me – Can't figure it out! And He chose you!!

And why is it God uses weak and flawed people like us?

4 Reasons!

1. Relatability

He chooses weak flawed people because that is who we most easily identify with. We relate to those people.

We can't relate to the holier than thou people, the self-righteous people like the pharisee in Jesus' day. ...No, but we can relate to Peter though. **Right!**

2. Our Need

He chooses weak flawed people because they're weaknesses and flaws need His loving forgiveness. His response to those weaknesses and flaws free them to move on to the new life He has for them. Their identities cease to be framed by their weaknesses and flaws. **They are mighty warriors!**

Other weak and flawed people who see the change in them, want that kind of freedom in their lives and that desire causes them to see their need for a Savior.

3. No Cause to Boast

He chooses weak, needy and flawed people because they have no cause to boast. 1 Cor. 1:29, "*so no one may boast.*" They **HAVE** to rely on grace.

If a skilled orator and leader had led the children out of Israel, he might have assumed to have done it through his own skill and leadership and not given the glory to God.

Had Peter been a righteous and holy man, he may not have seen his need to lean on God for strength and ability in moving forward after Jesus' death.

When you're flawed, you know it is GOD who does the work THROUGH you and not you on your own!

4. No Special Qualifications

God chooses and uses broken people to show us that He can save and equip anyone to do His work.

We can look at Moses and see that we don't need to be a great speaker or a skilled leader to do God's work. Or at Paul, and think we aren't good enough to be saved and used by God.

1 Timothy 1:15-17 NIV, *"Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen."*

Application:

Look, if you feel like you aren't good enough to be a Jesus follower, you're wrong. If you think you have to be a strong communicator to speak up front like I do, you don't need a communications degree and years under your belt at Toastmasters. **THAT ISN'T WHAT GOD WANTS.**

If God is speaking to you, putting a desire in your heart to do something, be teachable, be humble but trust Him to equip you and shine through you!

Don't rely on your own talents, skills, or abilities. **The Glory must be Gods!**

That's why God uses the weak, the flawed and the broken, not because they're capable - But because He is able. His light shining through us points others to Him.

God doesn't need us to be capable, He just needs us to be available!

So, if you feel flawed, that's ok. You're in great company! Open your heart to Him. Acknowledge your weakness and let His strength shine. Salvation or service – **PRAYER.**