

Weakness as Strength w/God-Strength a Fatal Flaw w/o God Call Phil 2.1-8; I Sam17; II Cor 12.8-10

Malcolm Gladwell's book, "David & Goliath" is fascinating! We know David WAS small with no armor and no experience as a soldier. AND Goliath was enormous, armored head to toe, with impressive weapons & was battle tested. **On the surface this was a complete mismatch!** But there is more to the story if we look deeper! The teenage shepherd was highly skilled with his sling shot. Watching over sheep everyday can be boring & gave him the opportunity to **practice, practice, practice!** More than practice, David bravely used his skill to defeat hungry bears & lions! What I did not realize until reading Malcolm's book was David's sling was a powerful combat weapon of that day. David's weapon was not like the little sling shot I played with as a boy! Imagine a rock this big, spun over the head with a sling and then flying off at an incredible, deadly speed!

Furthermore, I didn't realize Goliath's strengths were ALSO his weakness! This Philistine's great size meant he probably had a pituitary gland disorder, resulting in vision problems. Remember Goliath's telling David to come close so he could see him? Goliath's size also made him bulky & slow to respond. **SO**, Goliath was a huge, slow target for a long range sling shot! **WORST OF ALL FOR GOLIATH**, his strength made him **arrogant**. He underestimated the small shepherd boy, a **deadly miscalculation!** Countless sports teams as well as nations have made the same, costly mistake... Notice David refused Saul's heavy armor. He would have been defeated if he tried to match Goliath's strengths. **Most important**, David fully trusted the God of Israel to use his skill and courage.

The Bible is full of God's surprises:

For example, old age was not a roadblock to Abraham and Sarah serving God.

And unheard of in a male dominated time, Deborah became the supreme Judge of Israel and led God's army to victory.

Do you remember Ruth? She was a hated foreigner from Moab, with tragedies in her life. Yet God used her faith and family loyalty to become an ancestor of King David and Jesus!

Matthew's genealogy also records Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute, as an ancestor of Jesus..! Furthermore, the first disciples chosen were not what the world would value: Simple fisherman, a hated tax collector for Rome and a revolutionary! They were not highly educated nor deeply spiritual, but had hearts willing to learn and follow.

Likewise, Paul said the Corinth congregation members were poor, yet full of God's grace & love! **Jesus himself** was not who Israel or the Gentile world expected, being born in a barn to working poor parents! According to the prophet Isaiah, the Messiah would not be handsome nor charismatic. Instead, God's suffering servant came humbly.

Defying all human expectations, Jesus is God Almighty!

C.S. Lewis wrote "Christianity is **unexpected**- and that is **why I believe** the gospel is true!"

Malcolm Gladwell's book is filled with real life examples of people today defying conventional wisdom to build a meaningful life. Those with learning disabilities are often labeled as disruptive & discounted. Yet an incredible number of highly contributing people have learning disabilities...! Like David they adapted, used their unique gifts and found ways to circumvent the world's narrow expectations...

Wealth and success are other examples: We all know people who overcame poverty and injustice to lead meaningful, loving lives! At the same time wealth, fame and power sometimes result in a tragic, empty life. Celebrities have everything the world says is needed to be happy. **Yet many are human shipwrecks and tragic figures**, despite enormous talent and wealth! **One the other hand**, some of the rich and famous are compassionate, genuine people, using their money and position to do great good in the world! *God's way, not the world's selfish values, is the pathway to a life worth living!

Like David, **this church family** is not huge. Yet also like David, with God's unfailing love to share you can trust God to face any challenge! I have enjoyed serving small and medium size churches for decades. In those size churches everyone can be known personally along with the golden opportunity to be a welcoming church family - where all are included and no one is a stranger! In small and bigger churches **everyone is needed** and has a place to serve. Yet the value of each individual is most apparent in smaller churches!

Thank
* Malcolm
+ Bill
Gates

It is tempting to think one person can't do much in a world filled with huge problems and systemic injustice. However, David and Paul, Ruth and Mary the mother of Jesus remind me **one person with God's help** can make a difference. Acts tells us just a few disciples "**turned the world upside down!**" What matters with God is not size but our commitment to love God and serve those in need. In another story about David, when Samuel was sent to appoint a new king, the Bible assures us "**God values not outward appearances, but the heart!**" God asks only we be **large in loyalty, justice & compassion!** The prophet Micah declares: "God has shown us what is needed: To practice justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God!" Becoming more like Jesus matters!

Finally, **Paul's words** are quoted in Malcom's book. Paul's life reveals BOTH the dangers of strength and the opportunity of weakness! **Before encountering Jesus**, Saul was highly educated in the Bible, culturally trained, religiously dedicated and even a privileged Roman citizen. However, all these advantages only resulted in being a cruel and self-righteous persecutor of God's church. Being religious is not enough...!

Faithfulness requires becoming more like Jesus, becoming more humble and self sacrificing, more forgiving and generous. **The loving sacrifice of the cross** is the way to live and discover God's true power! Everything changed for Paul only when he met and followed the Risen Lord! The hateful persecutor became a powerful advocate for God's grace and grateful living. **Paul still used his previous strengths**, but now he did so for God's loving purpose. **And the painful physical weakness**, never healed despite repeated prayers, did not prevent Paul from doing good! To the contrary, he turned more to God's strength and help. So called "faith healers" are wrong when they insist healing is only a matter of faith. You and I know believers with ongoing hardships and tragedies who became even more loving and kind, more sensitive to the pain of others. AA and all support groups change lives because those who have suffered are able to understand and help one another be strong and heal. With God, even weakness and hardships can be occasions for doing good and loving more deeply.

Please google the lyrics to Lauren Daigle's song: "YOU SAY..." One line is inspired by Paul's experience: "God, you say 'I am strong' when I feel weak. And I believe..." **Who will we believe? What path in life will you follow? What way of life will we choose** for our church and our nation? Arrogance and raw power corrupts and is a dead end. Following Jesus leads to life, healing and justice for all people!

Like Paul, each us have "thorns" which hurt and hinder, whether they are physical or emotional, whether we face a roadblock or disappointment... Paul's life - long difficulty became an opportunity to grow deeper in faith, serving God and loving others more fully.

My grandfather died when my father was just 6 years old. I could feel my father's childhood loss and pain whenever Dad spoke of that tragic death. Yet, my father was especially kind and attentive to my brother and me. I think my Dad's great loss helped make him a deeply compassionate father. And my father's devotion born of loss, taught my brother and I to be good parents, and today our sons are also devoted fathers... Hardship can lead to compassion one generation to another...!

My wife Sally and I served a remote Chapel north of the Arctic Circle. **It was an adventure** with wonderful experiences among a village of remarkable native Alaskans. **However, those years also brought great challenges, heartaches and disappointments.** Those hard years drew us closer to God & each other. We appreciated more deeply every good and loving encounter. We experienced God's truth first hand: **God's grace is sufficient and even our weakness can be used by God to make us grow in faith and love!** Therefore, Paul urges believers to follow Jesus' path of humility and sacrifice, kindness and compassion. **There** we discover God's incredible strength...!

Paul urges believers to follow Jesus' path of humility and sacrifice, kindness & compassion, whatever hardship we may face. **Even in brokenness**, we can discover God's incredible strength and comfort...!

Hymn # 343 Called as Partners