

WHO GOD USES

In Gen 12:2-3 we read that God intended to bless not only Abraham, the ancestor of the Jewish nation, but that through him and his descendants, all the people of the world would be blessed.

*I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;*

*I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.*

³*I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.*

One of King David's psalms is found in 1 Chron 16:8-36

It begins:

*8 Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name;
make known among the nations what he has done.*

*9 Sing to him, sing praise to him;
tell of all his wonderful acts.*

*23 Sing to the Lord, all the earth;
proclaim his salvation day after day.*

*24 Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvellous deeds among all peoples.*

Sadly, the nation of Israel lost this outward look and regarded God's blessing as something for them, and them alone.

As followers of Christ, we too are called to tell of all His wondrous deeds to all around us.

You may think that God chooses people who have impressive abilities and gifts. While natural and spiritual gifts do play a part, they are not God's primary criteria.

In 1 Sam 16:7 God told His servant Samuel, "*The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.*"

The Lord works the same way today. If you find yourself focusing on inadequacies in your life, remember what God looks at.

The Bible is filled with examples of how God uses ordinary people to change the course of history.

In fact, the entire book of Acts is a narrative of story after story of how God uses people to shape the world.

Acts 4:13-14 AMP

Now when the men of the Sanhedrin (Jewish High Court) saw the confidence and boldness of Peter and John, and grasped the fact that they were uneducated and untrained [ordinary] men, they were astounded, and began to recognize that they had been with Jesus. And seeing the man who had been healed standing there with them, they had nothing to say in reply.

The established leaders were stunned at the boldness of the untrained, unqualified, and ordinary men Peter and John. Their only explanation for what they saw was that their time with Jesus had completely transformed them.

Let's just take a moment and go through a list of some of the unqualified and ordinary men and women God chose to work through to do the most unexpected things.

Noah – He drank too much, but, God used him to build the ark to save the world. (Genesis 6-9)

Abraham and Sarah – They were an old, washed-up couple who God used to build a nation. (Genesis 11-25)

Joseph – He was an entitled teen who went through God's classroom, training him to save both Egypt and Israel. (Genesis 37-50)

Moses – He was afflicted with a speech impediment, nevertheless he became God's spokesman and leader of the Israelite nation. (Exodus 3-4)

Rahab – She was a prostitute who God used to help his spies and defeat Jericho. (Joshua 2)

Jonah – He was the escapist who tried to go in the opposite direction to which God had directed him, but God brought him back to save Nineveh. (Jonah 1-3)

Esther – She was the adopted orphan who became Queen to save Israel. (Esther 1-8)

Peter – He was the quitter whom God brought back to build God's Kingdom. (Matthew 26, John 21, Acts 1-2)

Paul – He was the enemy of Christians who became the most prolific Christian writer in the NT. (Acts 7-9)

As you can see, there is literally nothing we can do to permanently disqualify ourselves from being a candidate who God chooses to work through. This inspires me because I can so often feel like I have failed, or missed my opportunity for God to work through me.

Your qualifications don't matter to God; your willingness to serve does.

God calls the willing not the able!

Dwight L. Moody

Dwight Lyman Moody was born the sixth child of Edwin and Betsy Moody on February 5, 1837. Moody's formal education ended after fifth grade. He was a short, overweight man. He had a slight speech impediment and a rapid-fire delivery when he spoke.

Moody began a Civil War outreach. From 1861 to 1865, he ministered on battlefields and throughout the city, state and country to thousands of soldiers, both Union and Confederate.

In June 1872 Moody made his first trip to the United Kingdom. While he was there a few close contacts urged him to come back in a year.

In June 1873, Moody and his family, and his good friend and musician Ira Sankey with his wife all travelled to Liverpool, England. Moody and Sankey travelled throughout the UK and Ireland holding meetings. He went to Ireland during a time when Catholics and Protestants were constantly at odds with each other. Moody was different: he did not care what denomination a person claimed, but just wanted the message of Christ to be heard. As a result, a revival swept into Ireland, and he won praises of both Catholics and Protestants.

Moody continued to evangelize throughout America, often preaching in major cities and at various universities.

On several occasions, he filled stadia of a capacity of 2,000 to 4,000. According to his memoir, in the Botanic Gardens Palace, he attracted an audience estimated at over 15,000 people.

Throughout his life, Moody always made every effort to show his love and care for his family.

Based on what Moody "brought to the table" in the way of natural abilities and education, he should have been a failure in every sense. Yet even though Moody has been gone since 1899, his ministry continues today. A ministry that not only includes Moody Bible Institute, but the church he founded, The Moody Church, and the Moody Press. Ministries today that are continuing to reach millions of people every year.

How is it that Moody's ministry was so powerful and effective? He took to heart the challenge of a British pastor who said:

"The world has yet to see what God will do with and for and through and in and by the man who is fully consecrated to Him."

"He said 'a man'," thought Moody, "he did not say, a great man, nor a learned man, nor a 'smart' man, but simply 'a man.' I am a man, and it lies with the man himself whether he will or will not make that entire and full consecration. I will try my utmost to be that man."

And this statement holds true for any man, woman or youth who chooses to consecrate their life to God .

Francisco and Felix

When we arrived in the village of San Pedro Sochiapam, in Southern Mexico, in 1970, we quickly noted that alcoholism was rife among the men. Soon after our arrival a new priest came to town with radical ideas. Former priests had forbidden the people to read the Bible, which they then concluded must be the devil's book, since in their culture one only forbids that which is bad. This new priest began handing out modern translations of the NT in Spanish to anyone who wanted a copy.

Francisco and Felix were the first to take his offer and begin to study the NT. Because of their limited understanding of Spanish they frequently came to us asking for help with understanding the Scriptures. Francisco shared with me how before becoming a believer he would take a flask of sugarcane beer with him to his field, and at times would be so drunk by nightfall that he would sleep in his field. Both of these men had only grade 2 Primary school education.

They were instrumental in establishing a church, first meeting in Felix's home.

And then as the church grew, meeting in José Crisanto's newly constructed home which became the church for the next few years – a tin roof, hand-sawn planks for walls, and a dirt floor.

Eventually they built a concrete-walled church that accommodated about 500 believers.

For several years Francisco was the pastor of the church, and remained an elder until his recent death.

Over the years the church has grown from just two believers to nearly a thousand, and in 2011 the believers completed a huge church to accommodate everyone.

Isabel Donato is another example of how God uses those who are willing to be used.

As the translation of the NT into the Chinantec language was nearing completion, we felt deeply concerned that the majority of people were illiterate. We developed a set of three Primers, 66 two-hour lessons, to teach the people how to read and write in their own language, and a fourth Primer to help them make the transition to reading and writing in Spanish.

Isabel was among the very first to enrol in the literacy class. I remember asking her why she wanted to join the group. She said "I don't want to rely just on what I can remember of the sermons. I want to read God's Word for myself."

Isabel was in her 40s, and had never been to school. She didn't know that eye movement is left to right across the page.

As Antonio taught the evening classes, I walked around as a teacher's assistant, checking on each student's work. As I pointed at symbols and words that Isabel had "learned", I became aware that she was just memorizing what the teacher said and wasn't really remembering the value of each symbol. But she stuck at it.

Suddenly, around lesson 34, I noticed a dramatic improvement in Isabel's ability to remember the symbols and sound out words. A couple of days later she visited us and told us what had happened:

"David and Christine, you know how I've been struggling with the literacy classes. I just couldn't remember what each symbol means. I would look at the symbols and they would get all fuzzy and become muddled in my memory. I felt like giving up. But I long to read God's Word for myself. This past Saturday a friend and I spent the whole day fasting and praying, and I told God that I wanted to learn to read so that I could read His Word and understand it better. I don't want to rely just on what the minister says. He has answered my prayer. Now, when I look at the page, the symbols are clear. I can remember what they mean!"

By the time Isabel graduated she could read slowly but accurately. But her journey wasn't over yet. Isabel took the NT portions that had been published and began to visit her friends and neighbours in the village and offered to read them God's Word while they continued with their household chores: shelling corn,

grinding the boiled maize into dough, patting out tortillas. Isabel sat in the doorway (most houses didn't have windows then) and read to them.

As the church organized outreach teams to evangelize the neighbouring villages, she went along and did the same thing as in her own village—visited the people in their homes and offered to read them God's Word.

This once shy, quiet woman has become known throughout the region. She has become a living legend among her own people: one who once was illiterate and of no consequence has made a huge impact on her society.

The NT dedication was held in September 1986. By then there were over 600 believers in Isabel's village, plus churches planted in nine other villages. It would be fair to say that Isabel's love for God and His Word and her desire to share that with others has been a significant factor in the growth of the church.

1 Cor 1:26-31 (Contemporary English Version)

26 My dear friends, remember what you were when God chose you. The people of this world didn't think that many of you were wise. Only a few of you were in places of power, and not many of you came from important families. 27 But God chose the foolish things of this world to put the wise to shame. He chose the weak things of this world to put the powerful to shame.

28 What the world thinks is worthless, useless, and nothing at all is what God has used to destroy what the world considers important. 29 God did all this to keep anyone from bragging to him. 30 You are God's children. He sent Christ Jesus to save us and to make us wise, acceptable, and holy. 31 So if you want to brag, do what the Scriptures say and brag about the Lord.

Note that the apostle Paul said: *Only a few of you were in places of power, and not many of you came from important families.* Paul probably spoke Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek and Roman, Lydia was a successful business woman, Luke was a doctor, Apollos was a Hebrew scholar.

But God delights in choosing people the world overlooks!

While there are no qualities or failings that disqualify us, there are some common "ingredients" we can find in the people God uses to do the extraordinary. As verse 30 describes, these qualities do not come from within us, but all are drawn from a close relationship with God.

Here are 4 ingredients that come from God that enable Him to use us to do the unexpected:

1. Courage

Winston Churchill said that courage is the first of human qualities because it is the quality that guarantees all of the others. Courage was the quality for which the first century Christians prayed.

Acts 4:29-31 (New Century Version)

29 And now, Lord, listen to their threats. Lord, help us, your servants, to speak your word without fear. 30 Show us your power to heal. Give proofs and make miracles happen by the power of Jesus, your holy servant." 31 After they had prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke God's word without fear.

Too often I let fear and intimidation silence me.

I need, like the Christians in this passage, to pray for God to give me courageous confidence. While most of us are not facing what these early disciples were dealing with (imprisonment, beatings, and possible death), we can still be silenced by our fear of criticism, or conflict.

Psalms 3:3 (New Century Version)

But, LORD, you are my shield, my wonderful God who gives me courage.

What the New Testament Christians knew, and what we are reminded about in the Psalms, is that courage does not come from sheer willpower, it comes from being close to God.

Pause and reflect

Do you pray for courage from God?

What are some courageous actions you have been too afraid or discouraged to act on?

2. Willingness

The second ingredients that come from God that enable Him to use us to do the unexpected is willingness.

Acts 16:9-10 NIV

During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, " *Come over to Macedonia and help us.*" After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Once God communicated with Paul about the needs of the people in Macedonia, Paul immediately changed his plans. He was willing, flexible, and ready to meet whatever need God showed him.

The apostle Paul, and really all of the New Testament Christians understood that being a Christian was not about them – their prosperity, their personal comfort, or their own plans and agendas.

It was not about introspection: Am I holy enough, worthy enough, educated enough?

Their enthusiasm and willingness to be used by God to accomplish his purpose led them to make personal sacrifices (Acts 5:32-37), to take risks (Acts 11:19-21), and to reach out (Acts 18:1-26).

The New Testament Christians were energized by the opportunity to be a part of something bigger than themselves.

Pause and reflect:

Do you believe that God can do great things through your life too?

Why or why not?

3. Teachability

The 3rd ingredient that comes from God that enables Him to use us to do the unexpected is teachability.

Being teachable is all about cultivating a hunger to learn. Do you have a hunger to learn?

Acts 17:10-12 (New Century Version)

10 That same night the believers sent Paul and Silas to Berea where they went to the synagogue. 11 These people were more willing to listen than the people in Thessalonica. The Bereans were eager to hear what Paul and Silas said and studied the Scriptures every day to find out if these things were true. 12 So, many of them believed, as well as many important Greek women and men.

The people who lived in Berea are described as being hungry to learn. No matter how young or old we are as a person or as a Christian, we must always cultivate a hunger to learn.

Pause and reflect

What areas do you need more spiritual input so you can grow?

4. A deep sense of purpose

The final ingredient of people God can use to do extraordinary things is a deep sense of purpose.

In Acts 26:16-20 Paul shares his testimony of God's calling with King Agrippa. In Paul's encounter with the risen Christ, he heard Christ say:

16 Now stand up. I have appeared to you, because I have chosen you to be my servant. You are to tell others what you have learned about me and what I will show you later."

17 The Lord also said, "I will protect you from the Jews and from the Gentiles that I am sending you to. 18 I want you to open their eyes, so they will turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Then their sins will be forgiven, and by faith in me they will become part of God's holy people." 19 King Agrippa, I obeyed this vision from heaven. 20 First I preached to the people in Damascus, and then I went to Jerusalem and all over Judea. Finally, I went to the Gentiles and said, "Stop sinning and turn to God! Then prove what you have done by the way you live."

From this passage it is clear that Paul understood that God had him on this earth for a defined purpose. He knew he was sent to people to open their eyes and to turn their hearts to God. His vision drove his every decision, every move, and every relationship.

The book of Acts is filled with stories of how God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things. When we are courageous, willing, teachable, and have a deep sense of purpose, God can write new stories with our lives.

Hebrews 11:32-34 says, *"I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength"* (NIV).

That final phrase is so significant — *"whose weakness was turned to strength."*
That's what God does with us: He takes our weakness and turns it into strength.

Hudson Taylor, a British missionary to China in the 19th century, once said, *"All God's giants have been weak people."*

You can see the truth of that statement throughout the Bible. You can see it in the lives of the great giants of church history.

God loves to use weak people to fulfil his will."

First Corinthians 1:27 says, *"God purposely chose what the world considers nonsense in order to shame the wise, and he chose what the world considers weak in order to shame the powerful"* (GNT).

It is in this way that God receives glory.

So in conclusion, it's not about a person's...

lineage

heritage

social standing

business acumen

wealth

education

physical ability

success

or any other criteria the world uses as a measuring stick.

If you are willing and available, God can and will use you in powerful ways.

It is about ordinary people trusting the outcome of our life and our service to an extraordinary God.

In John 15:16 Jesus said: *"You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name."*

AMEN!