

CREATED TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE
EPHESIANS 2:10 2 CORINTHIANS 4:6-7 1 CORINTHIANS 1:26-27

In April of 2009 a Scottish woman by the name of Susan Boyle appeared on England's television show, *Britain's Got Talent*. The show is similar to *American Idol* here in the United States. When Susan Boyle was introduced to the audience on *Britain's Got Talent*, their reaction was hostile and mean. If you look at a photo of her, you can understand why. She was homely and far from our standard image of a professional singer.

But when Susan Boyle opened her mouth and began to sing the song "*I Dreamed a Dream*," the audience was dumbfounded and immediately turned from mocking antagonists into raving fans. Let's listen for a few moments...

In the same way that Susan Boyle's outward appearance hid a remarkable talent, the Bible tells us that we too hold an extraordinary treasure – in spite of being flawed and imperfect. And just as Susan Boyle's amazing voice was revealed to a television audience of over 17 million, God wants to use **us** to reveal the treasure of His Gospel to the broken world around us.

I. WHEN IT COMES TO KINGDOM WORK, GOD DOESN'T CALL THE QUALIFIED. HE QUALIFIES THE ONES HE CALLS.

He says in 1 Corinthians 1:26:

"Remember...that few of you were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you."

I like the way the New Century Version puts it:

"Look at what you were when God called you."

- Unwise in the world's eyes
- Weak
- Poor

It's always been that way. The people Jesus chose to become His disciples certainly seemed unqualified for the Great Commission that He gave them just six weeks after His resurrection.

After all, they had:

- no formal education
- no financial nest egg to promote the ministry of Christ, and
- no political influence or marketing expertise to launch a new movement.

In his book *“Outlive Your Life,”* Max Lucado writes,

“In fact, what did they have?

Humility? They jockeyed for cabinet positions.

Sound theology? Peter told Jesus to forget the cross.

Sensitivity? John wanted to torch the Gentiles.

Loyalty? When Jesus needed their prayers, they snoozed.

When Jesus was arrested, they ran.

Thanks to their cowardice, Christ had more enemies than friends at his execution.”

But once the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, God equipped these timid, uneducated men to courageously turn their world upside down and boldly witness for Jesus Christ.

- Suddenly a fisherman with no seminary training preaches a sermon and 3,000 people come to faith in the same hour!
- A simple tax collector writes the Gospel of Matthew and it’s read by the whole world for centuries to come.
- Paul, the misguided zealot who persecuted the Christian Church, becomes its greatest missionary.

No, God doesn’t call the qualified. Instead He qualifies the ones He calls. But when it comes to you and me, we are tempted to believe just the opposite.

Satan’s lie is that God only utilizes experts and specialists... those with a high IQ or stellar looks or dynamic personalities. But the truth is that all you need to do is be willing to take a step forward when Jesus says, “Follow me.” Just like the disciples did.

Because God changes the world through ordinary people like you and me.

Max Lucado mentions the great example of Nicholas Winton from London. In the autumn of 2009, a group of 22 senior citizens traveled to England to express their thanks to Winton, who was 100 years old by then. They came because he had saved their lives 70 years earlier in 1939. Back then he was a 29-year old stockbroker. And when Hitler's armies started rounding up Czechoslovakian Jews and shipping them off to concentration camps, Winton decided to make a difference.

So he took vacation time and traveled to Prague in order to meet with Jewish parents, who pleaded with him to take their children back to England. Winton returned to work his job on the stock exchange by day and lobby on behalf of the Czech children by night. He was successful at convincing the British government to allow the children into England and found foster homes and raised funds to transport the children by train.

That year, Winton organized 8 transports of Jewish children out of Czechoslovakia, rescuing 669 kids. After the war, Winton never said a word about what he had done. Not even to his wife. Fifty years later she discovered a scrapbook with photos and the names of the children he had rescued. She urged him to tell his story, and over the years many have returned to say thanks.

Listen to this: There are over 7,000 children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren who owe their existence to Nicholas Winton's efforts. Some of them gave him a ring that is inscribed with a sentence from the Jewish Talmud. It says,

"Save one life, save the world."

God did amazing things through an ordinary stockbroker who responded to His call!

You and I are ordinary too, with lots of flaws. Why would God entrust to us the priceless treasure of the Gospel message? I mean, if it were you, wouldn't you put something that valuable into something better? Instead of clay, maybe marble or silver, or even gold?

A clay pot is shabby, it gets cracks in it and breaks easily. Why wouldn't God entrust the Gospel to some world leader or some powerful CEO – instead of to you and me?

Well, 2 Corinthians 4:7 tells us why God did it that way:

“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”

You see, God is to get all the credit for the transforming power of the Gospel!

SO WHAT EXACTLY IS GOD CALLING US TO DO?

HIS CALL IS TO DO “GOOD WORKS” FOR HIS KINGDOM.

Our text from Ephesians 2 says:

“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago.”

Or as the NIV puts it, *“...created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*

You and I may be ordinary. But God isn't! And He wants to use us to bring extraordinary blessings to the people He brings our way.

HOW DOES GOD QUALIFY THOSE HE CALLS?

To qualify someone means “to give someone a skill or attribute that is necessary for a particular activity.”

THE FIRST THING HE GIVES US IS THE “TREASURE OF THE GOSPEL.”

And that's **FORGIVENESS!** Forgiveness is often called “the treasure of the Church.”

- Freedom from the weight of our past sins! The ability to awaken each day to a clean slate. Fear changed to security. Despair changed to hope.
- We become members of His kingdom and even members of His family!

Second, **WE'VE BEEN SHOWN GOD'S GRACE!**

The Bible mentions it from cover to cover!

- The waiting father who runs to meet the prodigal
- The king who cancels a debt too large for any servant to ever hope to repay
- An employer who pays the latecomers the same as those who have worked a full day
- A banquet host who goes out to the highways and byways in search of undeserving guests
 - If you're a Christian, then you can say along with me that BY GOD'S GRACE we did not get what we deserved!
 - He knows every detail of our flawed history and chooses to love us anyway.
 - We deserved punishment and received forgiveness.
 - We deserved God's wrath and received His love.
 - We deserved debtor's prison and were given a clean credit history.
 - We deserved groveling repentance, and received extended arms and adoption into His family.
- And having received God's undeserved grace and love and forgiveness, you and I are set free to share that same grace and love and forgiveness with others!
- God has absolutely qualified you to answer His call to make a difference in the lives of others!

The second point of today's message is that:

II. WITH GOD'S CALL COMES OUR RESPONSIBILITY.

In the final sermon that Jesus gave before He went to the cross, He said that on Judgment Day, His followers will be held accountable for the good works that He's called them to do. What "good works" was He talking about? Let's look at Matthew 25:34...

"Then the King will say to those on his right: 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to

drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you looked after me. I was in prison and you came to visit me."

What is the litmus test for how much you love Jesus?

Jesus said it's your love for the least.

The hurting person. The proud person. The unattractive person. The forgotten person. The difficult person. The poor person.

Matthew 25 describes a scene where Jesus Himself will ask only one important question:

"How well did you take care of the people I love?"

And who are the people that Jesus loves?

He leaves no doubt in our minds that it's the poor, the needy, and the suffering.

In fact, Jesus clearly identifies Himself with the poor.

He doesn't say, *"When you clothe the naked, feed the poor, and visit the sick it means a lot to God, and it's like doing it for Him."* No, it says that when we do these kinds of things, we do them for Him. He **is** them. According to v. 35, Jesus **is** the poor!

He says, "I was hungry...I was thirsty...I was a stranger...I needed clothes...I was sick....I was in prison..."

And He makes the connection in v.40:

"I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."

Think for a moment about how simple these good works are that He mentions here.

Jesus didn't say,

"I was sick and you healed me."

"I was in prison and you freed me."

"I was lonely and you built an addition onto your home for me."

Jesus said that those who will be put at the right hand of God will be those who

- gave food to the hungry
- drink to the thirsty
- companionship to the lonely
- clothing to the naked
- comfort to the sick, and
- friendship to those in prison.

So what does this mean in practical terms?

WE'RE TO BE AVAILABLE FOR HIS CALL

Available NOW.

- Not once you get your life in order – Remember we're clay pots! It's the treasure of the Gospel inside us that counts!
- Not once your rich
- Or once your life isn't so busy
- Not once you're an adult, or once your kids are grown, or once you're retired
- EVERY DAY God calls us to do good works in His name!
- Are you unemployed? Retired? Shy? A new Christian? Widowed or divorced? Not in the best of health?

Great! Because God does His best work in our weakness! You're a great candidate to live out 2 Corinthians 4:7

"But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."

The first step in making a difference in the lives of those Jesus calls "the least of these" is to spend time with them. The Bible says:

"Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position." (Romans 12:16)

When the list is read of what you and I have done for the poor, the needy, and the suffering, it will give evidence of whether or not any of our Bible study, our quiet times, and our worship ever moved that short distance from our head down into our heart.

Did you know that there are over 2000 verses in the Bible that tell us we're to respond to the needs of the poor with tangible help?

Here are 3 ways to obey God's call to show compassion...

1. ENGAGE IN ROUTINE ACTS OF KINDNESS

We're to be answering God's call by doing something weekly, monthly, yearly...

- Give blood tomorrow and every quarter
- Pick up or deliver furniture once a month with Cornerstone's Furniture Ministry
- Be a Stephen's Minister and spend an hour a week encouraging someone
- Make cookies for college students from church and send them off with a note of encouragement
- Tutor Monday nights at Military Avenue in Detroit
- Volunteer in Children's Ministries or with our Student Ministries
- Why not focus in your prayers on one country that has greater needs than your own?
- Join other Cornerstone members who serve once a week at Love In the Name of Christ answering phones
- HELP MOPS by watching some preschoolers twice a month

2. ENGAGE IN SPONTANEOUS ACTS OF KINDNESS

When God interrupts your routine with an unplanned opportunity, take the time to follow up on it.

- If he puts someone on your mind, give them a call and spend some time with them
- If some time opens up unexpectedly in your schedule, reach out to a widow or single parent and offer to help
- If God surprises you with an unexpected financial blessing, pass on part of it to someone in need
- If someone is negative or critical toward you, respond with words of grace instead of retaliating

3. ENGAGE IN RADICAL ACTS OF KINDNESS

What do I mean by radical? I mean a sacrificial, strategic response to a need that God puts before you. By radical I mean that your “good works” will force you out of your comfort zone.

It might mean stepping out into a whole new area that you’re unfamiliar with...

It might require an intense level of commitment. It might call for a big sacrifice.

- Traveling to that country you started praying about on a short term mission trip
- Giving up a week of your vacation time to SERVE AT ELIM next June
- Adopting a single parent family or a senior as your extended family
- Helping with Community Connect on January 29th

CONCLUSION

Years ago a number of experts were debating whether there was a belief or a doctrine that was unique to the Christian faith. C.S. Lewis entered the room and was asked for his opinion. He responded by saying, “Oh, that’s easy. It’s grace.” Years later Gordon MacDonald said something similar:

“The world can do anything the church can do except one thing. It cannot show grace.”

That’s true. We live in a world that operates on the principle of what Philip Yancey calls “UN GRACE.”

Every institution in our world runs on ungrace and requires us to earn our way. School. Business. Sports. You name it.

As a result, the world is starved for grace. From the time they are young children, people have learned about the world of ungrace:

- ✓ The early bird gets the worm
- ✓ There is no such thing as a free lunch
- ✓ Might makes right
- ✓ Survival of the fittest
- ✓ You get what you pay for

- ✓ Look out for number 1
- ✓ Turn about is fair play

But you and I are different. *"For we are God's masterpiece. Created anew in Christ Jesus to do good works which he planned for us long ago."*

Answer the call!

- Weekly
- Monthly
- Yearly

Do you want to get closer to God this year? Why not take the lid off your clay jar and start pouring out the priceless treasure of God's love and grace? You'll be truly amazed at the results!