

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:  
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## I Corinthians 1:26-31 “Why God Delights in Saving Nobodies”

Intro. This morning I want to share the Scripture passage that had a major impact upon my life. When I was about 17 years old, I began to sense that God was calling me to preach the gospel. But in my mind I had a major problem, for I could not speak without stuttering, especially when speaking in public. You think *you* have a fear of public speaking, imagine *my* fear! Getting up in class to give a report just terrified me! Some of my classmates would make fun of my stuttering. So I just dismissed the thoughts about becoming a preacher from my mind. Surely, I thought, I was just misunderstanding God’s call.

But the call and the impression about preaching did not go away. For months I struggled with God’s will for my life. Finally, I went to a young preacher friend of mine and talked with him about it. After a while he thought of a sermon that he had on tape. He pulled it out for me to hear. It was by Dr. Adrian Rogers, based on this passage of Scripture. As I listened to that message, I finally understood why God wanted *me* to preach. Looking at myself from the viewpoint of the world’s wisdom, I could not understand why God wanted me to preach. Surely God would only choose someone who had great speaking ability; someone outgoing and popular. But when I heard the message of this text of Scripture, it was as if a light came on in my mind. I understood, from the viewpoint of God’s wisdom, why He wanted *me* to preach. And I am going to share with you this morning what I learned.

What about you? Do you sometimes feel so lacking in what you need in life? You try to live right, and so often you mess up. You try to succeed in various endeavors, and so often you fail? Is your self-esteem about this big [show on fingers]. Then this message is for you. Or am I speaking to some here today who have the opposite situation. You’re smart, strong, and capable? Perhaps you come from a prestigious family. To be honest, you are proud of your accomplishments and heritage, and you tend to look down on others. Well, this message is for you as well.

This morning we are going to look into this text of Scripture and see God’s wise plan for ordinary people. I want to show you how you can find wisdom, strength, and all the resources you need to face the challenges of life. Then we will also see God’s wise plan for extraordinary people. So first of all, let’s see from our text:

### I. GOD’S WISE PLAN FOR ORDINARY PEOPLE

Most of us fall into this category. Paul says in v.26, “For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.” Note that Paul modifies the word “wise” with the words, “according to the flesh.” In other words, he is talking about wise men according to human standards. This would refer to philosophers, the highly intelligent, and the well educated. The strong would include military leaders and great athletes. The noble, or well-born refers to the aristocracy of birth. Most of us would not fall into these categories. The reality is, very few Christians are among the intellectual, strong, and well-born of society. I’m sure that is true of our church as well. Do you see anybody here this morning of international fame? Do you see someone that if they died tonight, that there would be a big picture of them on the front page of all the newspapers? We may not have anyone that would make the front page of our local paper! In the world’s eyes, few of us count for much. Yet in God’s eyes, we

are very special to Him. And we are in good company. After all, His disciples were common, ordinary people.

Now based on vv. 26-28, I want to share with you 4 truths about ordinary people:

A. God Delights in Choosing Ordinary People - In vv. 27-28 Paul says, "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are." This fact has always been characteristic of Christianity. Christianity has always been most successful when it has spread among the common people.

Notice in particular whom God delights in choosing. He chooses those whom the so-called wise of this world calls foolish. Jesus prayed on one occasion, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes" (Mt. 11:25). The intellectual elite of Israel did not receive Jesus, but the common people did, and God saved them.

Notice also that God chooses the weak of this world. Most of us are weak in comparison to the strong and mighty.

And finally, he chooses those of common birth. When Paul says that God chooses "the base things of the world." The word "base" (*αγενης*) literally means "of no birth," or of low birth. It is opposite of the word translated "noble" (*ευγενης*), literally meaning "well born." They have no social standing. This would include people born on the other side of the tracks, so to speak. In v.28b such people "are despised." Oh, how the elite of this world often despise certain people. They look down noses on them with disdain. Well, whom the world rejects, God often chooses. Matthew, the tax collector, was despised by his fellow Jews, but Christ chose him to be one of His 12 apostles! In v.28c Paul even adds, "the things that are not." This is one of the most contemptible expressions in the Greek language. These are the people who are reckoned as nothing; the nobodies of the world. The phrase may have been used of slaves, who were regarded as nothing more than property. In fact, from this text and other evidence, we know that many of the Corinthian Christians were slaves. Some of you probably have had the painful experience of feeling like a nobody. Have you ever been in a crowd of people, and it's like no one even knows you're there? And do you know what really bad? It's when you stand around waiting on a salesman to help you, and he walks right past you, not even noticing you? Now you may feel that you are a nobody, but you are special to God.

Does vv. 27-28 describe you? You're not among the intellectual elite. You're not strong and capable. You were not born into an aristocratic family. Well I have good news. You're the type of person that God chooses the most! I also want to challenge you not to overlook the type people mentioned in vv.27-28 in our outreach efforts. These are the very people God can often use the most.

So God delights in choosing ordinary people. Secondly, though you are lacking:

B. God Will Provide What You Need for Salvation - The world assumes that salvation should be by your good works, or bestowed upon certain people groups of noble standing. Some feel they are too sinful, and too far from God to be saved. But I want you to know that salvation is not by human birth but by the new birth. Salvation is not by your goodness, but by God's grace. It is not by character, but by Christ. John 1:13 says that we are born again, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." V.30 tells us of God's way of salvation, "But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption." The main emphasis is on "of him" [by position in Greek]. He is

the source of everything that we need. The spiritual blessings that we need are not abstractions that elude our grasp; they are all in a Person, Jesus Christ. The Corinthians were saved and transformed wholly by the work of God. Eph. 2:8 says that salvation is “not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” Furthermore, Paul says here that we are “in Christ” because of the work of God. We are saved by being in union with Christ. When that happens, the exchanged life begins. We exchange our sin, ungodliness, and inadequacies for the divinely bestowed aspects of salvation mentioned in v.30. First, we can gain:

1. His Righteousness – Man can draw near to the holy God only if he himself is holy and righteous. Righteousness has to do with our standing before God. By union with Christ we are justified: His righteous becomes our righteousness. You see, we lack righteousness on our own. Isa. 64:6 says, “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.” But Christ becomes for us the righteousness which otherwise we do not possess. When God sees us in Jesus Christ, He no longer sees our sins. He sees the righteousness of Christ imputed to us (cf. Rom. 4:5). 2 Cor. 5:21 says, “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” When you trust Christ as Savior, you exchange your sin for His righteousness. Pretty good deal! And now when God looks at you and God looks at me, He doesn’t see all of our sins. He sees that we are covered with the robe of righteousness provided by Jesus Christ! Indeed, Christ has become our righteousness. Not only will God provide righteousness, but also:

2. His Work of Sanctification - This also is mentioned in v.30 (*hagiasmos*). God’s work of salvation is not just in forgiving our sins and getting us to heaven. God wants us to become morally pure. Heb. 12:14 says, “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.” But we lack holiness on our own. In fact, you can’t live the Christian life on your own. Sin is too strong, and you are too weak. And when you admit that you are too weak, then you are ready to receive the sanctifying work of Christ. By the Word of God and by the sanctifying influence of the Spirit of God, we can become the Christians God wants us to be. As we mature spiritually the frequency of sin decreases. The righteousness we have in Christ by position becomes more and more ours by experience.

3. Redemption – This word (*apolutrosis*) refers to setting someone free by paying a ransom. God by Christ has purchased us from the penalty & power of sin. We are freed from being slaves to sinful desire (Tit.3:3). I believe the word also refers to our final redemption (Luke 21:28; Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:14). Nothing less than this entire blessedness of our state of salvation is made ours in Christ Jesus. It embraces earth and heaven, time and eternity. So, in one sense, we have the three tenses of salvation given here: we have been saved from the penalty of sin (righteousness); we are being saved from the power of sin (sanctification); and we shall be saved from the presence of sin (redemption). And every believer has all of these blessings in Jesus Christ!

What do you need today? Do you need forgiveness? You will find it in Jesus. Do you need strength to overcome temptation and sin? You will find it in Jesus. Salvation is of the Lord, and not a work of man. Some of you need to turn to Jesus, and receive the salvation He is offering. Will you do it today?

So God delights in choosing ordinary people. He provides what we need for salvation.

Thirdly:

C. God Will Provide What You Need for Service – I believe this is implied primarily from v.27. We have learned recently that one of God’s 5 purposes for your life is to serve Him. Now if God chooses the foolish, the weak, the nobodies of this world, how is He going to get anything done? Have you heard someone say, “It’s hard to soar with eagles when you work with turkeys.” Well listen, God can make up for any deficiency that you feel you have.

Do you lack wisdom? Notice in v.30 that Christ “became for us wisdom from God...” The

moment we are saved our minds are enlightened to the wisdom of God. Then, day by day our minds are renewed, as Rom. 12:2 says. In Eph. 1:17 Paul prayed that we would be given by God “a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him”. And so, though God calls the ignorant, it is not His will for us to stay ignorant, but to filled us with true wisdom and understanding. That should be an encouragement to some of us. James 1:5 says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally....”

It is interesting how God has so often used those who were foolish in the world’s eyes. In Acts 4:13 we read that the disciples were considered “unlearned and ignorant men.” And yet God used those disciples to change the course of human history. They were used of God to help write the best selling book of all time, the Bible. The great preacher of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, D.L. Moody, was a man who murdered the King’s English and had few educational advantages. Yet he was used mightily by God. Hundreds of thousands were won to Christ through his ministry, and a great church and a great Bible college were founded by him. And so if you do not feel you are talented enough, and smart enough to be used of God, think again. Look to Jesus to give you the wisdom you need.

Do you need strength for service? Then God will bestow the strength you need. Isa. 40:29, 31 says, “He gives power to the weak, And to those who have no might He increases strength.... those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.” So when God chooses the weak, He knows that their weakness is no liability, if they will only believe in His promise to give strength. Someone said, “The task ahead of us is never as great as the Power behind us.”

It is interesting how God has so often used those who were weak in the world’s eyes. Speaking of some of the saints of the OT, Heb. 11:34 says some, “...out of weakness were made strong.” One of the greatest examples of this is the story of David and Goliath. When the Philistines selected a man to fight in a one on one battle against any man from Israel, they chose a giant, Goliath. He was over 9 feet tall. Israel kept looking for a man mighty enough to face the giant, but couldn’t find one. But God sent out a young teenage shepherd boy who believed that God was bigger than the giant. And with a complete confidence in God, he slew the giant. Weakness and insufficiency are the climate in which God’s strength is made manifest. In 2 Cor. 12:9 the Lord said to Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness....” Now how is that? When we recognize our weakness, then we are in a better position to trust in God to supply the strength we need.

Now listen, God doesn’t want you to serve Him in your weakness or ignorance. Some dear soul says, “Well, I’m going to serve God in my little ‘ol way.” Don’t do that! Serve God in His strength. Don’t minimize God’s potential in your life. God can do amazing things with our lives if we let Him. If you pray and trust God, He can exchange your weakness and fill you with His strength. He can take your ignorance away and fill you with His wisdom.

Do you feel like you are a nobody and God can’t use you? Well think again. When you become a Christian, you are born again, and you are now of noble birth! You are a child of the King. You’re not a nobody. You’re a somebody!

It’s amazing how God will repeatedly take someone from lowly circumstances and use him. For instance, God wanted to use Gideon to gain victory over the enemies of Israel. Gideon wasn’t of noble birth, but of low birth. And yet He addressed Gideon as a mighty man of valor. Gideon must have looked around and said, “Who, me?” Then he said, “O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house” (Judges 6:15). But God said, “Surely I will be with you.” With just 300 men and a wise plan from God, God used Gideon to defeat an entire Midianite army of tens of thousands.

Dear Christian, God often chooses the foolish, the weak, and the nobodies of this world.

But He wants to exchange your foolishness with His wisdom. He wants to exchange your weakness for His strength. He wants you to understand that you are no longer a nobody, but you are a somebody. He wants you to say with the apostle Paul, “I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me” (Php. 4:13). You can serve God in a mighty way if you will only trust Him.

And that leads to my 4<sup>th</sup> thought about ordinary people:

D. God Wants to Use You to Confound Those Who Rely on Human Resources - I believe that God has made this very clear in vv.27-28, “But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are.” Job 12:21 says of God, “He pours contempt on princes, and disarms the mighty.” There is a most beneficial purpose that God should expose them in their vanity and non-value lest men go on relying upon them to their everlasting disappointment and loss. As long as you are trusting in your goodness, or your family connections, or your church membership, you will not be saved.

Now this leads to the second group of people I want to address this morning. I have been talking about God’s plan for ordinary people. Next, let’s see from our text:

## II. GOD’S WISE PLAN FOR EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE

Now when Paul says in v.26, “For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called,” he did not say, “not any.” The Corinthian church had some described in v.26, and thank God for them. Lady Hamilton, who was a beautiful Christian, was born of royal blood. She said she was saved by an “M.” She said if Paul had said not “any,” she would have been excluded, for she was born of nobility.

Well what is God’s plan for such people? He certainly loves them, and He wants to save them as well.

A. Recognize the Spiritual Problem You Must Overcome - We might want to see the successful, the talented, the good looking, and the intelligent come to Christ and join our church, but the fact is, they are often difficult to reach. One main reason most of the world’s great and prominent people do not become true Christians is because of their own self-sufficiency. You see, the first step to becoming a Christian is a sense of need. You will never be saved as long as you are self-sufficient. Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 5:3). Until you see your own spiritual poverty, you cannot be blessed of God. But so often, the intelligent man believes that he is too smart to believe the simple gospel. The moral man believes that his morality is enough. The wealthy tend to trust in their wealth, not God. All too often, great influence and great strength keep people from admitting their need of God. In the days of John the Baptist, many Jews were trusting in their birth. They thought that just because they were Jews, they were automatically God’s children. But John the Baptist boldly preached in Mt. 3:9, “and do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.” I was born into a 5<sup>th</sup> generation Christian family, but I still needed to repent of my sin and be saved.

And this leads to my next point:

B. Cast Off All Confidence in the Flesh – Paul said in Php. 3:3, “For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.” Paul refused to put his confidence in the privilege of being born into the Jewish nation. He

placed no confidence in his circumcision. He gloried (*kauchaomai*) only in Jesus Christ!

C. Rely Wholly Upon God for both Salvation & Christian Service – Good genes and a good family upbringing can provide you with many advantages. You will tend to be more moral, and more obedient. But your goodness cannot save you. Titus 3:5 says, “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.”

Furthermore, you must rely wholly upon God to enable you to serve Him effectively. For if the strong, the capable, and the talented only trust in your own strength and abilities, then that is all you will have. God will not be involved. You leave God out of the equation. Listen, your human wisdom may be great, but God’s wisdom is far greater. Your human strength may be great, but God’s strength is far greater.

Now please do not misunderstand me here. We have some talented people in this church. I’m not saying that God doesn’t want to use your talent and abilities. He does. We learned that during our 40 days of Purpose. But what I *am* saying is, don’t serve God *only* with your natural abilities. You must still trust Him to elevate those natural abilities into supernatural blessings.

### III. GOD’S ULTIMATE PURPOSE FOR ALL PEOPLE

This is stated in our text both negatively and positively. First of all:

A. Negatively: Don’t Boast in Yourself – God’s plan of choosing the nobodies of this world is found in v.29, “that no flesh should glory in His presence.” Here in this world men strut in high honor, but this strutting is all a hollow show, about to burst like a bubble. As we shall see later, the Corinthians had a tendency to be “puffed up” with pride (1 Cor. 4:6, 18-19; 5:2). The lost world admires birth, social status, financial success, achievement, power, and recognition. But God is not impressed with such things. In Jd. 7:2 He explained why He wanted Gideon and such a small army to bring deliverance, “lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me.’” No flesh really has anything in which to glory; it only thinks it has. As Paul later said in 4:7, we have nothing that we have not first received. Are you boasting of your degrees, wealth, power, position, or talent? Then God can’t use you because the glory for it all is being misdirected. Although *in Christ* we can become wise, righteousness, and strong, we have no grounds for pride or boasting, because we did not deserve, earn, or produce any of this. If God has given me any ability to preach and teach, I know that I can’t brag, for my ability is of God. All that we have comes from God! Rom. 3:27 says, “Where is boasting then? It is excluded....”

Listen, the next time you get a little prideful and puffed up, you need to remember this text of Scripture. Paul reminds these believers in vv. 26-28 of who they were *before* they were saved. Don’t ever forget who you were before Christ saved you.

Furthermore, you can’t boast about your salvation. You can’t say, “I was so smart that I wrote down all the different arguments about God and examined all the religions in the world, and I came out on the side of God and Jesus Christ.” Salvation must be wholly of grace; otherwise, God cannot get the glory. The Gospel of God’s grace leaves no room for personal boasting. In fact, Paul said in Eph. 2:8-9 that salvation is by grace, “lest any man should boast.” So you can’t say, “I worked hard to earn my way to heaven.” The only way you and I get to heaven is through the cross of Jesus Christ, the call of God, and by simple childlike faith.

So I call upon you to heed to frequent appeal of Scripture, and walk humbly before the Lord your God.

B. Positively: Only Brag about God – Paul reaches a climax in v.31. He concludes by saying “as it is written, ‘He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.’” Paul’s final conclusion is inevitable. If there is any boasting, it must be in praising the Lord, who alone was able to provide wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. In this text Paul quotes in abbreviated form Jer. 9:23-24, “Thus says the LORD: ‘Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches, but let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me....’” When God takes a weak person and fills him with His power, the glory of His power is manifest, and *He* is to be praised. When God took a nobody and used him to conquer the giant, the Israelites gave the glory to God. All the praise goes to God, for every good and perfect gift comes from God (James 1:17). Later on this epistle Paul said, “I am what I am by the grace of God” (15:10).

And so, we must say with Paul, “May it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal. 6:14). If you are going to brag, be sure to brag on Jesus! When you get up and give your testimony, I hope you brag on what God has done in you, rather than what *you* have done for God.

A converted Hindu once said to his countrymen, “I am by birth of an insignificant and contemptible caste, so low that if a Brahman should touch me he must go and bathe in the Ganges River for purification. And yet, God was pleased to save me, and even call me to the high office of teaching the gospel to others. Do you know the reason for God’s conduct? It is this: If God had selected one of you learned Brahmans and made you the preacher, when you were successful in making converts, by-standers would have said it was the amazing learning of the Brahman and his great weight of character that were the cause; but now, when anyone is convinced by my instrumentality, no one thinks of ascribing any praise to me; and God, as is His due, has all the glory.”

Yes, and when God uses me to preach the gospel, and when people are saved, and when the church grows, I take no credit for myself. In my own flesh I cannot even speak. All the glory goes to God. And when God uses you to do something for Him, be careful to give all the glory to God.

Conclusion: God has a wonderful plan for your life. He wants to help you do things for Him that you never thought possible. You may start teaching a SS class. You may get up and sing a solo, or give a testimony, trusting in God to help you. For the first time you may become a soul winner, witnessing for Jesus, and leading others to Christ. Your life can make an eternal difference in the lives of others. So whether you are humanly smart, or not so smart, strong or weak, rich or poor, talented or not so talented, God can enable you to effectively serve Him, if you will only rely wholly upon Him, and if you will give the glory to Him. Rise up, oh church. As the great William Carey said, “Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God.”

There are probably some here today who have not yet received God’s gift of salvation. You can exchange your sin for His righteousness and holiness. You can exchange bondage to sin to freedom from the power of sin. You can exchange hell for heaven. Look to Jesus. Salvation is not by your goodness or righteousness or good works, but salvation is all from God. Trust in today!

Sources: C.K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968); Oliver B. Greene, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (Greenville: The Gospel Hour, Inc., 1965); R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937); John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 5 (Pasadena: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Paige Patterson, *The Troubled Triumphant Church: an Exposition of First Corinthians* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [CD-ROM]* (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Jerry Vines, *God Speaks Today: A Study of I Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Wise: I Corinthians* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983); Dr. Ed

Young (notes from his sermon on 1:26-2:5 dated 11/10/85). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).