

Against All Odds

by Alistair Begg

Alistair Begg's sermon 'Against All Odds' explores how God uses our weaknesses to showcase His strength and glory in our lives.

Duration: 41:28

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Judges 6:36-40, Judges 7:2, Judges 7:17, Judges 7:22, 1 Corinthians 1:26-29, 1 Corinthians 1:31

Topics: "Faith And Trust", "Gods Sovereignty"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the story of Gideon from the book of Judges. He emphasizes the importance of recognizing our weakness and dependence on God. The speaker highlights how Gideon's strength and boldness came from his awareness that he was nothing without God's help. The sermon concludes by discussing the sights and sounds of victory and how Gideon's strategy involved simple actions that anyone could do, emphasizing that God is not interested in military skill but in the number of people who trust and obey Him.

Transcript

Father, we pray that we may honor you as Lord in the study of the Bible. We're desperately in need of your help. We don't want just to listen to a man's voice.

We want to hear from you, the living God, and so we pray that we might worship you in our preaching and in our hearing and in our understanding and obeying your truth. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

I invite you to take your Bibles and turn again to the portion of Scripture that was read from Judges chapter 7. We are essentially in a little mini-series that began a few weeks ago. We began by considering the statement made by Jehoshaphat, recorded in 2 Chronicles 20, when he is aware of the vastness of the army that is approaching him, and he admits to being clueless and powerless. And he stands in the public arena before the people and before God, and he says, O God, we have no power to face this vast army, and we do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you.

We, on our last time together, then went to Judges chapter 6, and we saw another example of this same principle--the call of God to Gideon, Gideon responding to the arrival of the angel of the Lord by saying, How can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest, and I am the least in my family. And in both incidents--and then in the follow-on in chapter 7 this morning--we are confronted by a foundational principle that runs all the way through the Bible. And it is essentially this, that God works through people and through

circumstances in such a way as to leave people in no doubt that he alone is God and that he's not going to share his glory with anyone else at all.

In other words, that God is the wholly adequate one, and it's important for us to realize how inadequate we are. That, of course, is a hard lesson to learn. That's why I think the Bible again and again comes back to it, all the way through the Old Testament and then into the New.

In 1 Corinthians, when Paul is writing to the Corinthian believers, he says--and I'm quoting now from the Living Bible, just so that the freshness of it may be a help in reviewing familiar verses--he says, Notice among yourselves, dear brothers, that few of you who follow Christ have big names or power or wealth. It's an interesting thing to write, isn't it? He says, Think about it. Just think about the congregation there in Corinth.

Not many of you are peculiarly well known or significantly powerful or phenomenally wealthy. But God has chosen deliberately to use ideas that the world considers foolish and of little worth in order to shame those people considered by the world as wise and great. He's chosen a plan despised by the world, counted as nothing at all, and used it to bring down to nothing those the world considers great.

And then he says--and this is the purpose that God has been operating on or by--so that no one anywhere can ever brag in the presence of God. So that no one anywhere can ever brag in the presence of God. And then, as he quotes the Scriptures, he says, If anyone is going to boast, let him boast only of what the Lord has done.

Now, if we're going to come to terms with Judges 7, we need to understand this principle. The key to the chapter is in the second verse. If you look at it, you'll see it quite straightforwardly there.

Gideon, unbeknownst to him, has been born for battle. And this young man, who is now entrusted with the responsibility of leadership, is going to have to wrestle with the fact that against the run of play and entirely against all odds, God is operating according to this principle. Now, I've tried to say to you that when we study the Bible together, one of the questions that we should ask of a passage of Scripture, especially one that we're familiar with, is, What's surprising in this? And that was the first note that I wrote down for myself.

I wrote down a question, What's wrong with this picture? Because there's something wrong with this picture. It's not the way we would expect it to be. It comes out wrongly from our vantage point.

Notice, first of all, the opposition that Gideon was facing. They're described as being in the north of the valley in verse 1, but you need to go down to the twelfth verse to get an idea of just what it is they're up against. And the Midianites, the Amalekites, and all the other eastern peoples had settled in the valley thick as locusts.

Their camels could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore. Now, if you imagine camels--and they're fairly big, one man to a camel. There might have been two to a camel.

They might have been riding a pillion, I suppose, one hump or two. But there they were, and the camels, when you sought to count them, were more numerous than could actually be collated at all. Well, that's the opposition that Gideon and the folks face.

The assessment--and this is the key now in verse 2--the assessment of God as he looks on this scene is absolutely phenomenal. Presumably, Gideon would have looked out on the company that he had--thirty-two thousand troops--and considered that against the vastness of the opposition that he was facing. He would then be doing the maths in his head, I wonder how I can break up thirty-two thousand to somehow or another offset the advance of these amazing and significant hordes.

Now, even the events of chapter 6, dramatic as they are, could not have prepared Gideon's ears for what they are now hearing. Am I really hearing what I think I'm hearing? The Lord said to Gideon, You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. Too many.

What's wrong with this picture? That doesn't make sense, does it? It surely doesn't make sense that if you've got a huge opposition force, you would need as many as possible to go against the vastness of the opposition, that you would be able to match strength for strength. And it doesn't make sense. That is, not until we understand the necessity of weakness.

The necessity of weakness. Not the advisability of weakness, not the posture of weakness, not the pragmatic benefits that may come from adopting the procedures that accrue from weakness, but actually, when we recognize the necessity of weakness itself. God's purpose for his people in every age is that we might depend upon him entirely.

And God is at work in people and in circumstances so as to achieve that objective in our lives. That is what will make sense, ultimately, if not in time, of all the things that don't make sense at the moment. Because many things in our Christian pilgrimage don't fit into nice, neat categories, do they? There are many things that are part and parcel of our lives that, from a sort of normal vantage point, we look at the circumstance and we say, This doesn't make any sense at all.

God knows that. He knows that we're prone, in and of ourselves, to rely on ourselves, to rely on our methods, to rely on our traditions. I just came from Scotland on Friday evening, and if ever there's a group of people tempted to rely on their traditions, they're over there.

Or to rely on our personalities. Or to rely on our gifts. God knows that a church like Parkside Church is prone to self-congratulation--to congratulate ourselves on any apparent cleverness, to congratulate ourselves on any significant contributions that we believe we have been able to make.

And God is at work then and now so as to bring each of us as individuals and as groups to the awareness of the absolute necessity of weakness. Now, it would be one thing if pride emerged purely on a physical or material plane. But the fact is that pride is at its ugliest when it emerges as spiritual pride--when people begin to boast of their experiences of God, or of their intimacies with God, or of the peculiarities of things that God may have shown them, or secrets into which he may have taken them.

Those intimacies, those gifts, are not for public display. People misunderstand that and go around and boast. That's what the people were doing--the super-apostles that Paul was referring to when he wrote 2 Corinthians.

All of these people seemed to be so powerful. They seemed to have many stories to tell about how they were adequate and fulfilled in the power of the Spirit, and how inadequate this fellow, the apostle Paul, seemed in contrast. And he's tempted to get involved and do the same thing that they do.

And he says in 2 Corinthians 12, I've plenty to boast about, and I wouldn't be a fool in doing it, but I don't want anyone to think more highly of me than he should from what he can actually see in my life and my message. I will say this. Because these experiences I had were so tremendous--this is the Living Bible again.

Paraphrase. God was afraid I might be puffed up by them, so I was given a sickness which has been a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to hurt and bother me and prick my pride. That's a totally different perspective, isn't it? The NIV translates it, to keep me from becoming conceited, there was given me a thorn in the flesh.

I think the message says, to stop me from getting a big head, God did this. How gracious of him! How gracious and kind! Because weakness and inadequacy is the key to usefulness. Hence Paul's encapsulation of what we find in Judges 6 and 7 in a phrase, When I am weak, then I am strong.

Conversely, when I am strong, then I'm actually weak. Have you ever considered the possibility? I have. I do.

I hope I do routinely. Have you ever considered the possibility that God has not given to you as an individual the privilege of serving him as you might, and the barrier to usefulness is your sense of personal adequacy--that your screensaver retreats to your credentials and to the things that mark your identity out as significant in our culture, in your street, in your environment? And these are the things that make sense of you and explain you, and therefore, when it comes to service for God, you're tempted to lead with them. God, I'm sure you must be delighted to know that I've done this and qualified for that and secured this and done all these various things, and here I am, ready to be useful for you.

And God says, Why don't you just sit down over there in the corner? I'll get back to you. Maybe. And as you sit over in the corner, you watch somebody else being raised to a position of usefulness.

And you say, Well, now, how is it that she is so useful, and I don't have those opportunities? Well, it may be that God is still at work to convince you of the absolute necessity of weakness. You see, what God is doing here is not trying to avoid a defeat. He's working in such a way as to make sure that when the victory comes, those who are involved will know the source of their victory.

Now, when he finally gives victory, nobody will stand around and go, What a brilliant strategy! What a phenomenal idea I had! What a significant role I've played! But the people will stand around and look at one another and say, Can you believe this happened? Look at what happened here! But you see, we're not prone for that. We're not built for that. We're built for sitting around congratulating ourselves.

Can you see what we've done? Isn't it amazing what we've managed to accomplish? You know, once we were here, and now we're here, and then we went over there, and we did this, and we did that. People say, Oh, it's an amazing story. Wonderful story.

God says, Sit down at the back of the bus. Now, you'll notice that he does this reduction purposefully. It's a two-stage reduction.

Reduction Part 1 is according to Deuteronomy 20. I want to show this to you. You can turn just back a few pages to Deuteronomy 20, and you'll see why it is that the instruction is given that if anybody is trembling with fear, they can leave.

In Deuteronomy 20, you have the instructions that God gives to his servants for going out to war. And there are various reasons that somebody can slip out. If they've built a new house and not yet dedicated it, then they can go home and do that.

If they've planted a vineyard and not had a glass of wine from it, then they can go home and enjoy it. If they have got engaged and not married, then they can go home, because they might die in the battle, and then someone else will marry their fiancée. And in verse 8, is any man afraid or faint-hearted, let him go home, so that his brothers will not become disheartened too.

Makes a lot of sense, doesn't it? I mean, you want your people there focused on what they're doing. You don't want them thinking about their girlfriend, you don't want them thinking about their vineyard, you don't want them thinking about the crown molding in their house, and you certainly don't want them there if they're scared to death of the whole prospect. In other words, the morale of the army is more significant than the numbers involved in the army.

You know that if you've ever taught, if you've ever been a coach for any kind of soccer team or a football team or any kind of team at all. The morale is so crucial. You don't want anyone in the room who's second-guessing everything, saying, Oh, I don't think we can do it.

Do you know how many points they scored in their last game? Do you know how terrific they are? You want people saying, Let's go! And so Gideon gives the announcement. He says, according to Deuteronomy 28, anyone--you can imagine him standing up in front of the crowd and the word going out, otherwise he had a very loud voice--thirty-two thousand people--anybody who's trembling with fear and would like to go home, just slip off now. And he stands, and there's just one or two people begin to move out from the front, and then it gets a little more, and the trickle becomes a stream, and the stream becomes a mass exodus.

And all of a sudden, he's standing in front of it, and over two-thirds of his army leaves. Twenty-two thousand people leave! And he was thinking, How am I going to do it with thirty-two thousand? And he's now down to ten. You can imagine him looking up, saying, All right, Lord, I get it, I think.

Are we done now? The Lord says, No, you still have too many. What? And then he gives him the instructions as to how he's going to separate them. I'm going to choose them.

He says, If I say this guy's going, he's going. If I say he's not going, he's not going. And so Gideon took them down to the water, as the Lord had told them.

And then we have the lappers and the kneelers, and the kneelers and the lappers. And, you know, if you take these two verses and write them down and try and figure out who's doing what, it's like a Chinese puzzle that you can't solve. Wait a minute, I thought he was lapping.

No, he's kneeling. So eventually, you say to yourself, This can't be the point! I mean, if it's this difficult to understand who's doing what, this can't be the point. That's important, because most Sunday school lessons, this is the point.

And many sermons, this is the point. And if you've listened to sermons on Judges 7, you have got all the equipment to tell how it was that the alert ones were chosen, and the dummies who were half-asleep with their heads in a bucket, they were sent home, but it was the smart guys and the brave guys and the alert guys who were finally kept in the group of 300. No.

I'm prepared to say absolutely, categorically no. I agree with Michael Wilcock, and he's a good fellow. He said--he said, if you're gonna agree with somebody, agree with a good fellow.

He says, Once we find ourselves asking why lapping was the sign of a better soldier, I am sure we are on the wrong track. Once we start to figure out why the lappers were better soldiers, we're on the wrong track. You see, God was not reducing the numbers so as to get three hundred Marines.

This is not how God got rid of the twenty-two scaredy cats and the nine thousand seven hundred folks whose heads were in a bucket, and he was left with three hundred, you know--the guys, the quarterbacks, the Marines, the leaders. That's very appealing, and that's how the chapter is often taught. So the word to the congregation is, Don't be like the twenty-two thousand who ran away.

Don't be scared. And don't be like the nine thousand seven hundred who were drinking in the wrong way. Get yourself in the three hundred.

So everybody's looking around going, Well, I wonder how many of us are in the three hundred? And so it goes. Only the tough guys are left. Only the wise guys are left.

Only the brave guys are left. No! No! You think of the whole nine thousand seven hundred fellows. Can you imagine a guy going home, he shows up at his front door, and his wife says, What are you doing here? I thought you were in the thing with the Amalekites.

He said, I thought I was in the thing as well. I was in the thing. You're not gonna believe this.

When they gave the word about anybody who wants to leave, twenty-two thousand left. So we were down to ten thousand. Then Gideon came up with this thing about drinking, and before I knew it, I got tapped on the shoulder.

He said, Go home. I was ready. I had my stuff.

I'm ready. And now I'm out. She said, Oh, you must have done something wrong.

I don't know what. Messing around. No wonder I told you you'd get thrown out.

Well, who got left? What kind of people did he keep? Wrong question. Wrong question. That's the way we think.

What kind of people do you want? God wasn't doing something about the kind of people. It wasn't a particular kind he was getting, it was a particular number he was getting to. He was just getting it down to a number that was so small, so inadequate, so patently incapable, that when the victory came, all three hundred would know God did this.

Now, God moves in mysterious ways in order to accomplish this. The second heading that I wrote in my notes, picking up around verse 9, was God's grace and patience with his servant. God's grace and patience with his servant.

Verse 9, God comes, and during the night he speaks to Gideon. He says, I want you to get up and go down against the camp, because I'm going to give it into your hands. And Gideon sat up in his bed, looked across at the calendar on his wall that said, God said it, I believe it, that settles it.

And he said, here we go! Bumper-sticker time! God said it, I believe it, that settles it, ho-ho, we're going. No, he didn't. Now, we're not told of any interaction that takes place between the ninth and the tenth verse, but we know that God is sensitive to his servant, because he says to him, you know, I'll maybe just mention this to you, but if you're afraid to go down and attack... That was a very nice question.

That was a gracious way to put it, wasn't it? Afraid? He's scared to death! I mean, what about chapter 6? Could I have a wet fleece with dry ground? Okay. Could I have a dry fleece with wet ground? In other words, I know you said what you said, and I know no one's ever fallen off this ride before, but I hate it when the bar comes down, you know? The great rollercoaster ride of faith, when finally the bar comes down, and it's just you in the thing, holding on for dear life. God gets us there.

One way or another, he gets us there. If he has plans and purposes for us--and he has plans and purposes for us. Good deeds foreordain for us to do, Paul says in Ephesians 2.10. And he brings his servants graciously and kindly, the way a father pities his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.

And so he doesn't come to Gideon in his fearfulness and say, Come on, Gideon, give yourself a shake and get down there. How many times am I going to do things for you? No, he says, Gideon, if you're afraid, son, why don't you and Purah, your servant, go down to the camp? Do a little reconnaissance. We can cast all of our cares upon our heavenly Father.

We can lay all of our burdens and all of our fearfulness down at his feet. It's okay to come to him and say that we don't know what to do. The reason that we're very poor at helping other people who don't know what to do is because we have such smug looks on many of our faces that suggest we know everything to do.

So someone comes into Parkside Church, and they don't know what to do. They haven't got a clue, they're burdened, they're weary, they're fearful, and so on, and they're sitting next to somebody who's very adequate. And if ever the person was prepared to let their guard down and say, You know what? If I told you the week I've just had, I don't think you'd even sit next to me.

The person says, You know what? I'm sitting next to the right person, because I've had an unbelievable week too. I was so afraid. I was so wandering, so doubting.

And if God hadn't come to me and said, That's my story too! Now, listen to what he's to do. Verse 10, if you're afraid, go down. Verse 11, listen to what you hear.

They go down, and there's two Midianite soldiers, and they're talking to one another. You can imagine it like in Hamlet, you know, Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, when the soldiers are up on the battlements in the night, and they say to one another--I forget what it is, but one of the lines is, The moon is not yet up. You know.

I don't know how many times you've said that lately to somebody, but that's the kind of thing that soldiers say on battlements. Aye, the moon is not yet up. And so the fellows are there, and they're giving it, The moon is not yet up, to one another.

And then another fellow says, You know what? I had a really weird dream. He says, Tell me what it was. Now, they don't know that Gideon and Purah are hiding over here behind a tent.

And the guy says, Well, I was dreaming, and a loaf of barley came tumbling into our camp and completely flattened one of our military tents. Collapsed it! You can imagine Gideon nudging Purah, going, I wonder what this is about. And then they can't leave their ears when the other soldier says, verse 14, That can be nothing other than the sword of Gideon, the son of Joash the Israelite.

God has given the Midianite and the whole camp into his hands. What are the odds of a loaf knocking down a well-constructed tent? They're about the same as the odds you would get for three hundred people going against the army of the Amalekites and the Midianites, whose camels were so numerous that you could as easily count the sand as you could count the number of camels. Those are the kind of odds you would get.

And God, because he is so kind and gentle and gracious to his children--he knows we're fearful, he knows we're faltering--and he comes to his servant, and he gives him this wonderful little insight. And look at what verse 15 tells us. When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he worshipped God.

He worshipped God. Now, there's surely a wealth contained in those three words. He worshipped God.

This fearful, fragile, unlikely leader pours out his heart in praise to God. Oh, this is the kind of thing--again, you go back to the superapostles in 2 Corinthians--this is the kind of thing that the superapostles want to get out and tell everybody about. I'm very significant, and this is what I've done, and this is what I'm going to be doing, and this prophecy has been said, and I've understood it, and so on.

No, there's none of that from Gideon. It just says that in the privacy of his experience, he worships God. And then he returns, and he calls out--notice--get up, get organized, watch me, follow my lead, do exactly as I do.

So, in other words, fearful Freddie--I just changed his name for the moment--but fearful Fred, when he steps out in front of the people for whom he is responsible, he doesn't step out like some diffident little character. This is the mistake we often make here, and I want to make a--I hope you understand this. When Gideon stepped out, he said, Okay, guys, here's the deal.

We're gonna be going down, I want you to get yourselves organized, get in three groups of a hundred, grab your materials, make sure you've got it to hand, and do exactly what I do. Follow my lead. Have you got that? Okay, this is what we're going to do.

People are saying to one another, When alive! Where did he get so bold all of a sudden? In the private place? In the secret place? You see, there's a difference between a God-given, Spirit-filled, holy boldness and a manipulative, bombastic, personality-driven stratagem for moving and steering people. One can be produced on a purely human plane. The other may only be discovered on your face before God when you acknowledge that you can't do a thing, that you are wholly inadequate.

Now, I want to tell you that if it's not going particularly well with your fourth-grade Sunday school class, I've got a strategy for you. Get away by yourself with God and lie out on the grass, face down, and tell God that you're a useless teacher and the class doesn't listen, and you're seriously thinking about chucking it, unless he would show himself strong. If your effectiveness is less than it could be under God--it's obvious to all--then the antidote is not to do what contemporary psychology tells us to do--pump ourselves up, gee ourselves up, get a group around us to say, You could do it! You could do it! You can! You can! But the key is to get before God and say, I can do it! I can do it! I can't! I can't! I am the least! My family is the

weakest! God says, I think we're about ready to go, Gideon.

We had 32,000. We went to 22,000. We're down to ten.

We've got some dream here about a barley loaf knocking down a tent, and all of a sudden he's on his feet. Don't misinterpret. Strength of leadership, or boldness, when you encounter it, as being anything other than that which comes from the awareness in the secret place that we are completely nothing without God's help.

See, what a man or a woman is on their knees before God, that's what they are and nothing else. Now, the final thing I wrote down in my notes was just simply the sights and sounds of victory. The sights and sounds of victory.

It's a wonderful conclusion, isn't it? Okay, here's the plan, he says. I want you to blow the trumpet, I want you to break the jar, and shout. Incidentally, in verse 8, it's quite fascinating when it's said that Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites to their tents--9,700 of them--but kept the 300, who took over the provisions and trumpets of the others.

You know, 300 guys with 9,700 trumpets. But presumably, it just means that--I don't know what it really means, but it's fascinating to me, thinking these guys with all these trumpets. So he says, Look, put down those trumpets, just get yourself one trumpet, and this is what we're gonna do.

We're gonna blow the trumpet, we're gonna smash the jar, and then we're gonna shout. Now, I don't want you to smash the jar, but let's just try parts 1 and parts 3 right now. Okay? Let's have a go at it.

They blow the trumpets. Okay, and let's see how you're doing with the shouting for the Lord and for Gideon. Okay, he says, I think we're ready to go.

What's totally fascinating in this is that the commands that he gives involve no military skill whatever. That's why I say to you that he's not interested in the kind, he's interested in the number. If he was looking for Marines, then presumably that was because he was about to implement a strategy that only Marines would be able to understand and implement.

But he's about to implement a strategy that anybody could implement. I mean, do you have breath to shout and blow a trumpet, and can you smash a jar? Well, the average guy's smashing dishes all the time if you let him in the kitchen, so it's not gonna be a problem for him to smash a jar. And then the story finishes in that way, doesn't it? They put themselves in position.

They get around the camp. At the given signal, they blow the trumpets, and the Lord caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords. Do you think it's strange that God would use such unlikely methods? Think about that before you answer.

Do you think it's strange that God would use such unlikely methods? No, not really. Because hasn't God been using unlikely methods in your life? Despite what people say about Christianity, that Christianity's about you plug in, and you move on, and it gets really great and super, you encounter Jesus and you begin to follow him, and life became very, very difficult for you. You discover that illness came into your life, and frustration and failure.

And these things, from one perspective, don't seem to make any sense at all. Why is it not going swimmingly? Because God is using these things as instruments of his rule in order to bring you, his servant, to the place of total inadequacy. Why would he have given victory to Gideon in this scrappy little force? Well, I've got a better one than that.

Why would God become flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, from whom men hid their faces, who was despised and rejected of men, and they did not esteem him? Why would God invade the earth in such an ignominious way, in such a picture of weakness? And why would God triumph over the works of the devil, over death and over hell, by putting his Son up on a cross to die in ignominy and in shame and in apparent failure? Why would he use, as the motif, inadequacy? For the very same reason that he uses you and me. Who would have thought that God would choose to reach the world through the likes of us? Well, you say, Well, I can understand why. Through me? Okay, well, you go over there and sit down for a minute with another twenty-one thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine.

No, the fact is, it's unbelievable. Now, let me finish. The point is simple, isn't it? When we're tempted to push ourselves to the front with our credentials, remember this principle.

God is not remotely concerned with our credentials. I mean, when the preacher said to a gathered congregation in Chicago, The world has yet to see what God will do with a man wholly yielded to him, some little guy from a shoe shop puts up his hand and says, I'd like to have a try at that. That was Dwight L. Moody.

Who's Dwight L. Moody? What did he have? When he went to preach in Scotland at the turn of the century, in one of the biographies, it says a man who would minister to a Scottish congregation must come from the highest halls of learning, must pour out the theology of the Bible in a skillful and orderly fashion, must be able to move people by the forcefulness of his rhetoric, and so on. And then the biographer says, No one in all the world was less likely to achieve this in Scotland than Dwight Lyman Moody. And then it goes to the next paragraph, and it says, The closing meetings for Moody and Sankey in Edinburgh were held on Arthur's Seat, a hill, a green hill, behind Holyrood Palace.

The closing meetings of Moody and Sankey were held on Arthur's Seat, there not being an auditorium in the city large enough to contain the crowds. And at that closing meeting, many of the theological dignitaries from the Free Church and the Church of Scotland and the Free Presbyterians were all there to say, This is a marvelous doing, and it is God that has done this, because Dwight Lyman Moody? Pfft! Except for God! See, we're so used to thinking that the things that we put on our CVs that get us in the door for jobs are the significant things. They may be the very antithesis of the things that God is working on.

Let me quote, in conclusion, from *Loving God* by Chuck Colson. He describes going back to the prison in Delaware, where he himself had been incarcerated, and the wonderful event that was taking place right there in the chapel. And he said, As I sat on the platform waiting my turn at the pulpit, my mind began to drift back in time to scholarships and honors earned, cases argued and won, great decisions made from lofty government offices.

My life had been the perfect success story, the great American dream fulfilled. But all at once I realized that it was not my success God had used to enable me to help those in this prison, or in the hundreds of others just like it. My life of success was not what made this morning so glorious.

All my achievements meant nothing in God's economy. No, the real legacy of my life was my biggest failure--that I was an ex-convict. My greatest humiliation, being sent to prison, was the beginning of God's greatest use of my life.

He chose the one experience in which I could not glory for his glory. See? Now, when you think about it in those terms, you realize how God is able to sweep all of our failures and our disappointments into fulfilling his purpose, so that the great and transcendent power might be seen to belong not to the old clay pots, which are our lives, but to his transcendent power, which is found in the Lord Jesus. Father, I pray that you will help us to think these issues through, both as individuals and as a church congregation.

We're fearful, Lord, lest we begin to rely on ourselves, our plans, our methods, our traditions, our personalities, the people who are involved, as if somehow or another we are also very, very special and important. We recognize that you've given us wonderful opportunities, but we know that you do not depend upon us. And so we pray that in our sense of total inadequacy, we may find your adequacy again.

I pray, Lord, this morning for some in our congregation who need to be corrected in thinking wrongly about these things--those of us who think that the way to really influence people is to get a few whiz kids in and let them know that there are Christian whiz kids. It will always be possible to out-whiz people. Some of us need to be rebuked because we have focused far too much on our own CVs and our credentials and our gifts, forgetting that we can't even breathe of a morning apart from your grace.

And some of us at the other end of the spectrum need the encouragement of your Word because we've begun to think that there's nothing we can do. Our family's the least, and we're the weakest, and really, we're so inadequate. And we pray that the encouragement of these events may stir us up to serve you as we might.

And so we pray that you will help us this morning as we look out on a new week to cast our cares upon you and to trust in you resolutely for everything. For Jesus' sake we ask it. Amen.

That concludes this message. Thanks for listening to Truth For Life. If you'd like information on ordering additional messages from Alistair Begg and Truth For Life, then call our resource line at 1-888-58-TRUTH, write to us at Post Office Box 39-8000, Cleveland, OH 44139, or visit us online at truthforlife.org.

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