

which was most likely a physical illness, but that did not disqualify him from ministry. "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (II Corinthians 12:8-10). God's grace makes up for the difference when we are willing to follow Him.

The young minister Timothy, had some stomach trouble and other physical weaknesses, but that did not disqualify him from being a pastor. "Drink no longer water, but water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities" (I Timothy 5:23). Paul did not tell Timothy to stop ministering because he was sick, but encouraged Timothy to minister, "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (II Timothy 2:1-2).

The reality is that all of us are imperfect vessels in one sense or another. Yes, if we have sinned, we need to have a repentant heart as David

did. Then David said, "Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee" (Psalms 51:13). Isaiah, the prophet, also declared that he was a man of unclean lips. However, once the seraphim cleansed his lips with a coal from the altar, he declared, "Here am I send me."

God is also more concerned about our willingness to follow him than our physical perfection. Nick Vujicic, was born without arms or legs and would have committed suicide if he could have, but he has turned his life over to follow the Lord. God has now given him a world wide ministry.

Again, it is the GRACE of God that makes up for our imperfections. Paul said, "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (I Corinthians 15:10).

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Imperfect Vessels

At times, we make statements which are not completely true and often disqualify ourselves and others from the ministry that God is leading us into. A statement that I have often made is, "Hurting people hurt people." While I see this statement is true on various occasions, it is not an absolute truth. Here is another thought that I have had, "How can I teach about physical healing when I have various physical problems?" If I take that thought as the absolute truth, then I probably will never teach on physical healing. "How can I counsel anyone if I have problems in my life, myself?" I have heard others say, "We can't give if we are in poverty ourselves." Each of these statements may have a degree of truth in them, but they also may be deceptive. When we make such statements as absolutes, we disqualify ourselves and others from ministry. The reality is that God uses

imperfect vessels! When we read the scriptures, we often idolize the Biblical characters and overlook their imperfections.

Let us briefly look at some Biblical characters. Abraham slept with Hagar, a woman that was not his wife, yet the Bible tells us that he is the father of our faith. Moses had a hot temper and murdered an Egyptian, threw down the tablets with the ten commandment in a fit of anger, struck the rock in anger when God told him to speak to it, and married an Ethiopian woman who he should not have married, yet God called him the meekest man on the face of the earth. David committed adultery and then had the woman's husband murdered, yet God called him a man after the heart of God. Paul had been the one who was rounding Christians up and having the executed, yet God had him write most of the books in the New Testament. Our past failures don't necessarily disqualify us from ministry. God uses imperfect vessels.

Abraham lied about Sarah being his sister, but prayed for the Abimelech's household to be healed and God healed them. "So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children" (Genesis 20:17). Although, Moses had a speech impediment, that did not disqualify him from speaking. "And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or

who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD?" (Exodus 4:11).

Job was a man was filled with fear and although he repented of his self righteousness, he was still sick when God told him to pray for his friends. Being sick and devastated did not disqualify him from praying for his friends. It was not until he prayed for his friends that he was healed. "And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before" (Job 42:10). James wrote that we are to confess our sins and pray for others that we may be healed. "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16).

Elijah was running from Jezebel in fear and had become suicidal when God gave him an assignment. "And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room" (I Kings 19:15-16). The only disqualification would be disobedience.

Jonah saw people of Nineveh as his

enemies, but that did not keep God from giving him an assignment the second time to go to preach to Nineveh. Even when Jonah preached only half of the message, God used it to cause Nineveh to repent. "So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them" (Jonah 3:5). Even though we don't see that Jonah ever really fully repented, God still used him to the extent of his obedience.

There was a widow woman who had just fixed her last bit of food for herself and her son and was planning on dying, when the prophet, Elijah, told her to fix some food for him first. When she was obedient, God sustained her and her son. "And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days" (I Kings 17:15). Her lack of food did not keep her from ministering to Elijah. In the New Testament we find that the widow woman who cast in just two mites was used of Jesus to minister to his disciples. "And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living" (Mark 12:43-44).

Paul was given a thorn in the flesh,