

# Successful Servants

How God Uses  
Unlikely People

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## Successful Servants

*"For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him." (2 Chronicles 16:9)*

Henry Ford, the industrialist who built the car which to this day still carries his name, was strictly a pragmatist. He never wasted words. "The Church," he observed, "has to be a divine institution because no other organization so poorly organized and run would have survived for 2,000 years!"

Ford was right in acknowledging that the Church is divine. But what he didn't realize is that it is not a corporation, an industry, or a business. He failed to understand that God raises up and empowers individuals to accomplish His purpose in a vastly different manner than is done in business or industry.

Why God chooses to use some individuals who have few natural qualifications and talents and bypasses others who seem more equipped in terms of aptitude, training, and education has never ceased to amaze me.

### ***God Uses Unlikely Individuals***

Consider the following:

- **John Bunyan**, a man who spent a considerable part of his life in the Bedford jail because he refused to knuckle under to the established church, was a tinker by trade, a man who repaired metal pots and pans. Today, we would call him a welder. Yet Bunyan gave the Christian world *Pilgrim's Progress*, a book which has blessed generations of men and women who see themselves in the struggles of the characters in Bunyan's story.
- **Dwight L. Moody**, the shoe salesman turned evangelist, lacked culture and education, yet made an impact on two continents for God in the latter part of the nineteenth century.
- **C. I. Scofield**, a lawyer, struggled with a miserable marriage, yet wrote the notes to the study Bible that bears his name.

- **Charles Spurgeon**, the greatest pulpiteer of his day, struggled with deep depression for most of his life.
- **Alexander MacLaren**, a godly man whose masterful sermons are still widely quoted, lived with such an inferiority complex that when he heard Spurgeon preach, he vowed that he would never go into the pulpit again.

These men are but a few who represent the many. Today, the situation is no different. More names—our contemporaries—could well be added to the list: Billy Kim, Mike McIntosh, Raul Ries, David Wilkerson, Nicky Cruz, John Perkins, Joni Erickson Tada, Coach Bill McCartney and a long, long list of others. These men and women have been used by God to touch people's lives, yet they began their ministries without great promise of success.

### ***The Story of World Missions Is No Different***

- **Mary Slessor**, a red-headed Scottish lass, was forced by her family's poverty to work part-time with her mother in the Dundee textile mills at the age of eleven. Her father, an alcoholic, didn't work enough to support the family, and after a while she had to drop out of the mill school to work full time. From the age of fourteen she was the sole supporter of her family. Exposed to missions in her teen years, Mary felt called to Africa. Her family background and lack of education worked against her becoming a missionary, but Mary had a fiery, determined spirit. Despite tremendous odds, she was finally appointed to missionary service.

Arriving in the Calabar (known today as Nigeria), Mary learned that people there believed that if twins were born, one of them had been fathered by the devil. To make sure that the devil's child did not live, the custom was to kill both babies. Through her work in Africa, Mary was able to save the lives of hundreds of babies who otherwise would have been murdered. Growing up in the streets of Dundee, Mary developed grit and temper. A temperament that matched her fiery red hair and her readiness to use her fists enabled her to do what many would have feared to try.

- **Hudson Taylor**, the man who founded the China Inland Mission in the latter half of the nineteenth century, was known as a misfit. Often sickly, he went to China against the advice of Christian leaders. To identify with the Chinese, Hudson dressed in their clothing, grew his hair long, and wore it in a braid. He would have fit into a California beach scene, but he did not fit so well in the proper British missionary community where his fellow missionaries dressed in suits and long dresses for evening tea. Yet none of them left so great a mark on china as did Hudson Taylor.

- **Evan Roberts** was an introvert whose prayers sparked the revival that shook his beloved Wales at the turn of the twentieth century. Sometimes when he was asked to preach, Evan would slip into the back of the church and sit there weeping, more concerned that God should do something than he should take the pulpit.
- **Amy Carmichael** was loved by the people of India, among whom she worked, especially the hundreds of girls she rescued from temple prostitution. But she was denounced by many missionaries who looked down on her way of doing things and who eventually launched a “Get Amy out of India” movement.
- **Brother Andrew**, as he is known to the world, had neither high school nor college education. He described himself as a “stubborn Dutchman, the son of a blacksmith, employed by a Jewish carpenter.” Today the ministry called Open Doors, which brother Andrew started, has a presence in more than 200 countries. In addition, more than 10 million copies of *God’s Smuggler*, the book that tells the story of Open Doors, are in print.

Brother Andrew attended a two-year missionary training school where he was described as a “mediocre student.” Upon graduation he was told, “Andrew, there is no need for you to apply here to be a missionary—you are simply too weak to travel.” Andrew almost believed them but didn’t. Instead he went where others dreaded to go, touching the hearts of millions who received Bibles because a persistent Dutchman wouldn’t quit when others said, “You don’t have what it takes to succeed!”

### ***The Bottom Line***

Scores of well-educated, talented individuals with good family connections have failed to make so significant a mark on the world as these I have mentioned. Why is this so? Does God shun education, training, good family connections and—well, let’s face it—brains? Not for a moment. As I’m writing this, I’m sitting in the Divinity Faculty Library at Cambridge University. For several days I’ve been in book lover’s heaven. I’ve held in my hands centuries-old Bibles, autographed by some of the world’s greatest scholars. I’ve looked at copies of ancient biblical manuscripts that provide the authentic texts of our Bibles, and I thank God for the great scholars and leaders who have contributed much to the Church.

But the fact is, many of God’s choicest servants never darkened the doors of an Oxford, Cambridge or Princeton (or even a humble Bible school somewhere),

while many individuals who had so much going for them never made so great a mark.

Is it possible that human strength can become spiritual weakness? Perhaps the reason God uses the less qualified individuals to do His greatest works is this: when a person lacks much, he or she also trusts much and relies upon God rather than on his own knowledge, wealth, family connections, good looks or other attributes. On the other hand, a person who has much often trusts his own resources and abilities rather than the God who called him to service.

The Apostle Paul said to the Corinthians,

But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not, to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.  
(1 Corinthians 1:27-29)

When I was doing research for my book *Heroes: People Who Made a Difference in Our World*, I realized that many of the people I most admire fall into the same category as these men and women I have described. Yet as I analyzed their lives and backgrounds, I saw certain common qualities—reasons, I believe, why God chooses unlikely candidates for success and uses them greatly.

What qualities do these men and women have in common?

### ***Quality #1: Unswerving Obedience to the Call of God***

When the prophet Samuel confronted Saul, who had disregarded the Word of the Lord and did what seemed good in his own sight, he said, “Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams” (1 Samuel 15:22).

When God calls you, there are but two choices: obedience or disobedience. There is no third option! When God spoke to Abraham and asked him to go to a land He would later give him, Abraham’s response was, “OK, let’s go!” Today, many would say, “Hey, God, what’s the matter with my serving You here? Ur’s a nice place—good schools, shops and golf courses. Nice neighborhood—looks good on a business card.” When God said, “Abraham, I want you to give me your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love,” he responded in simple obedience, assured (so says Hebrews 11) that if God should demand the life of his son, He would raise him from the dead. The response of many today would more likely be, “God, can’t we make a deal? I’ve got quite a lot of money and

lots of servants. How about giving You ten of my finest men? I'll pay their salaries, and You can send them anywhere You want."

Many well-qualified individuals lose out with God because they want to make a deal with Him, saying, "I'll go so far but no farther." They are interested in serving God more in an advisory capacity than in grassroots involvement. This kind of attitude not only leaves them out of corporate headquarters but also doesn't give God much to work with when it comes to His kingdom.

God wants all you are and all you have. I'm reminded of the story of the chicken and the pig who are walking down the road. They pass a church with a sign out front which says, "Missionary Breakfast—Saturday, 8 a.m. Proceeds go to feed African children." Says the chicken to the pig, "Great idea! Tell you what—I'll donate the eggs, and you donate bacon and sausage."

The pig, not thinking quickly, had to mull that over in his mind for a moment. Then the light came on! "For you," he said, "that would be a donation, but for me it would be a total sacrifice."

Gladys Aylward was known as "The Small Woman." Both *Time* magazine and *Reader's Digest* carried her story. Gladys, the daughter of an English postman, quit school at the age of fourteen to become a housemaid. Eventually she was accepted in Bible school, where she flunked out and was asked to leave to make room for someone more qualified. She fell back on her household skills and accepted another position as a housemaid.

But Gladys had been called by God and knew that He wanted her to go to China. Perhaps not fully understanding either the distance involved or the implications of going from England to China, she was undaunted. She began saving from the pittance that was her salary and eventually went to the railroad station and told the agent that she wanted to buy a railroad ticket to China.

The agent laughed at her but she persisted! The ticket cost much more than the money Gladys had, but she opened a saving account and kept on saving. She knew that someday she would go to China.

The day finally came when she had enough money to buy the one-way ticket from England, through Europe, Russia and Siberia into China. What a funny sight she must have been, using her petticoat as an "inside suitcase," sewing in valuables that she didn't want stolen.

On the train she met a Dutch couple who said to her, "We will pray for you every night at 9 o'clock for the rest of our lives." Gladys never saw the couple again, but she needed their prayers.

Inside Russia, Gladys was caught in the Bolshevik Revolution, kidnapped by men who wanted to make her a forced laborer. She narrowly escaped, leaping to the deck of the ship as it was pulling away from the dock.

When she finally arrived in China, she was greeted coldly by the senior missionary who showed little interest in having her help. Gladys was working with children when the Japanese invaded. When it became apparent that they would all be killed, she led ninety-four children to escape across the mountains of Northern China through two provinces—a nearly impossible feat! She didn't know that it couldn't be done. She simply knew that God wanted her to save the children and she obeyed.

Why are we so hesitant to follow God? The issue here is *control*: we are more interested in “being in control” than in trusting our Sovereign Lord to guide and direct our lives.

One time I was asked to fly from Southern California, where my wife and I lived (at least part of the time), to a church in Oregon I had never visited. The pastor, who invited me, is a pilot. “I'll meet you in Salem,” he said, “and we can fly here in my private plane.” He explained that if the weather was bad, we would drive, but driving took two hours whereas the flight by private plane would take no more than thirty minutes.

A hard rain was driven by the wind as our commercial plane arrived. Walking into the terminal I was greeted by a young man who said, “Pastor couldn't come so he asked me to meet your flight.”

I picked up my luggage claim and headed toward the parking lot when he said, “No, we go this way.” I thought, *No—this guy surely cannot be heading for a little plane, can he?*

That's exactly what happened. He led me to a single-engine aircraft, and we boarded. As I tightened my seat belt I prayed, *Lord, is there anything that we need to get straightened out before I take this flight?*

It was still raining hard, and as the little Piper club took off, it seemed that the plane was tossing and pitching in the wind. I fly a lot, and I handle commercial flights without sweaty palms. But when it comes to little planes—especially in storms—I could be a candidate for the “Chicken of the Sky” award.

As we struggled to gain altitude, a single windshield wiper went swish, swish, swish. I also knew that there were mountains at the end of the valley. I had seen them as we flew in.

After a few minutes the pilot took his hands off the stick and was tweaking and turning various knobs on the instrument panel. This bothered me. After a few seconds, I called out, "Wouldn't it be safer if you just kept one hand on the stick?"

He smiled and said, "Naw, it's on automatic pilot; it's much safer than if I were flying manually."

I settled back a bit, still with sweaty hands and thought, *That's the way it is with us. We still want to have just one hand on the stick instead of relaxing in the knowledge that God has things on automatic control and He is in charge.*

Men and women who have been used by God have settled the issue of who is in control. They follow Him, uncertain as to where God may be leading, but confident that God knows what He is doing, and that He will direct and keep them day by day.

### ***Quality #2: An Undivided Heart***

Unlikely candidates who are used by God are individuals whose "hearts are fully committed to him" (2 Chronicles 16:9). They have ceased to follow their own agendas, letting God call the shots.

On May 21, 1927, Charles Lindbergh took off from the East Coast of the United States, determined to fly across the cold Atlantic. Five men had been unsuccessful and had died attempting to do what he wanted to do. Lindbergh took a map and drew a line across his route at the halfway mark. This was his point of no return. No matter what happened, when Lindbergh crossed that line, there was no going back. Unlikely candidates used by God have crossed that line as well.

David Livingstone, whose frail body was buried among the great in Westminster Abbey, had a life motto that says, "I will place no value on anything I have or possess except in its relationship to the kingdom of God."

Dwight L. Moody often quoted the words of William Varley: "The world has yet to see what God can do with and for and through and in a man who is totally dedicated to the cause of Christ." But Moody added, "I will strive to be that man!"

An unlikely candidate for success himself, Moody was once confronted by a woman who said, "I don't like your theology!" To this he replied, "Theology! I didn't know I had any theology!"

The Congregational Church, which he attended, turned him down when Moody applied for ordination. Edward Kimball, Moody's Sunday school teacher and the man who went to the store where the eighteen-year-old Moody was working and led him to Jesus Christ in a back room, said, "I think the committee of the Mount Vernon Church seldom interviewed an applicant for membership who seemed more unlikely even to become a Christian...still less to fill any sphere of public or extended usefulness." (George Sweeting, *Too Soon to Quit*, p. 23).

Moody's grammar and his theological training may have been lacking, but he had a great heart for God. He gave himself completely and without reservation to Him who had called him.

### ***Quality #3: Simple Faith***

They have a simple faith that God will honor the promises in His Word. Hebrews 11:6 says, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (KJV).

In 1979, I went to China for the first time. We began working with pastors and Christian leaders—many of whom had been imprisoned for their faith—and we saw manifestations of the power of God in ways that simply are not seen in the West. These incidents have no simple scientific or psychological explanations.

I am thinking of the doctor who had been imprisoned for six years. We had noticed that one side of her face bore a depression several inches in diameter. She explained that she had had cancer and that surgeons had removed it. But when it came back the second time, they said, "There is nothing more that we can do."

"The elders in my church anointed me with oil and prayed for me," she said, "and when that happened, the cancer dried up and dropped off."

Some of the events we witnessed, which we felt, were equally supernatural manifestations of the grace of God and did not involve physical healing. There were times when God would quietly speak to someone's heart, and he would say, "I think God wants us to leave a day early and go home," thus avoiding arrest by the police.

As a Westerner who is pragmatic and (yes, I admit it) somewhat skeptical—having seen far too many individuals who try to "help God out"—I kept asking myself, *Why do the Christians here see healings and the supernatural when we don't see the same thing in the West?*

The answer that came to me is that they have wholehearted faith that God will honor the promise of His Word. Lacking the benefit of medicines, CAT scans and diagnostic procedures, they simply read the Word and believe it. And they know that God honors His Word.

Some people say, "God no longer does that!" and for them in their circumstances, they may be right. But that is not true for thousands of Chinese Christians whose faith in God's promises produces astounding results.

Unbelief is not programmed into the thinking of men and women who will be used mightily by God.

Adoniram Judson, a missionary to Burma, is one of my heroes. I will never forget my first visit to Rangoon. I was met at the airport by a gracious Burmese brother, the grandson of one of the men who had put slabs of gold on the massive Shedagon Pagoda which we passed on our way from the airport to the city. Since it was illegal for a foreigner to stay with a Burmese family, Ronnie, my host, took me to a little hotel.

When I was shown to my tiny room, I asked, "Does that air conditioner work?" "Oh, it works fine once the room gets cooled off," the clerk said.

Time proved otherwise. The compressor in that unit must have frozen shut about the time Columbus sailed. It was hot in any language. At about midnight, I opened the little window, hoping for a breeze that never came. It was one of those humid, muggy nights where anything you touched clung to you.

As the sun was starting to rise the next morning, I went to the little window again and looked out over the city. To my surprise, I saw numerous church spires and heard the church bells. My eyes filled with tears as my heart cried out, "Thank God for Adoniram Judson!"

Who was Adoniram Judson? He was not only the first evangelical missionary to step foot on Burmese soil, but also the first American missionary. Arriving at the Rangoon Harbor in Burma in 1813, he was met by an official who told him the best thing he and his young wife could do is to get back on the ship and go somewhere else because he was neither needed nor wanted in Burma.

Judson did stay, though it cost him dearly. He labored for seven years without a single convert. He was unjustly beaten and thrown in prison. He eventually buried his wife and daughter. He suffered a nervous breakdown without family, friends or support, but he did not quit. He translated the Bible into Burmese and endured, eventually becoming the father of the Burmese Church. Judson

believed that if he was faithful, God would eventually honor His Word, which would not return void but would accomplish the purpose for which it was proclaimed (Isaiah 55:11).

Unlikely candidates for success who will be used by God have a stubborn streak, whether it is Brother Andrew, Adoniram Judson, Amy Carmichael or the street preacher David Wilkerson who confronted New York street gang members. They don't quit when the going gets tough. If the test of your character is what it takes to stop you, these men have a titanium streak where most people just have a backbone. "They just don't know enough to quit," some say, and perhaps they are right.

Raymond Buker won a gold medal in the Olympics of 1924, the same year Eric Liddell also won medals (*Chariots of Fire*). Buker married and asked to be sent to the hardest place his mission could find. It was Burma, the same place where Judson had labored more than a century before.

As Dr. Buker sat in my tiny recording studio one day after I had done an interview with him, we quietly talked. "What was the darkest day of your missionary service?" I asked.

Dr. Buker paused for a moment and then began to tell about the time his wife had a nervous breakdown. There was no hospital, no medication to give her relief, and the closest doctor—his twin brother—was seven days away by horseback. He narrated how he put Mary on the back of a horse and walked with her for seven long days, comforting her as best he could, quoting Scripture to help relieve her fears.

"Anytime something like that happens a man who really loved his wife would quit and come home," some say. Ray Buker was sensitive and caring. He stayed with his wife until she regained her composure and equilibrium. Unlikely candidates seem to draw strength from the Almighty when tough times knock at the door of their lives. And the word "quit" is not in their vocabularies.

#### ***Quality #4: Genuine Humility***

Genuine humility is much different from a poor sense of self-image. Men and women who seem unlikely candidates for success, but are being used by God, often do remarkable things. They translate Scripture, they give birth to hospitals, they put radio and TV stations together. They find opportunities when others have all but given up, but they understate their achievements and refuse to take credit for what God does. They understand that it is God who opens doors that allow them to accomplish His plan.

## ***Quality #5: A Strong Work Ethic***

These unlikely candidates for success did the tasks immediately before them and trusted God for the next step. Most of them did not graduate from top-ranked schools; some of them did not even go to college. But the fact that they had no formal education doesn't mean that they lacked intelligence. On the contrary, formal education sometimes puts people in a rut, and it is often hard to get out of it.

Not knowing (or accepting) that a task simply cannot be done, God's unlikely candidates for success sense what He wants them to do and move ahead. They often work harder and smarter than those who have been taught the "correct" way of doing things but who don't have the courage to withstand the criticism of their colleagues.

William Carey, a shoe cobbler turned linguist, is known as the "Father of Modern Missions." Carey had many reasons to stay home in his native England, and then—after he finally went to India—he had more reasons to quit and come home. Like what? Insufficient funds, a wife who was mentally ill, the tragic death of their eight-year-old son, and the warehouse fire of 1812 which destroyed his grammar books, his polyglot dictionary and the only copy of the Bible he had translated.

So he buried himself in grief and remorse, right? Not so! That's what most of us would have done, but not William Carey. This man, who wanted to be known as a slow but steady worker, knelt down and thanked God that he had the strength to start over again. He did, and his second translation of the Bible was even better than his first.

Proverbs 3:5-6 admonishes, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." Simply put, this means you don't have to see the whole plan, provided that you have the light to take the next step and the faith that God has led you and will show you the second, third, and successive steps.

For many years I have carried a photocopy of a page from one of Francis Schaeffer's books where he mentioned how some people would confront him with the question, "What is your five year plan?" he would tell them that he didn't have one because he was committed to the leadership of the Holy Spirit who had not yet revealed what he was to do five years hence. Schaeffer's reply gave me comfort because God has never shown me His will in chunks of five and ten years. Instead, He reveals the next step and makes it very clear that I must trust Him for the future.

When I was first considering embarking on a ministry using media—not yet seeing clearly how it would all come together—missionary Paul Finkenbinder (known in Latin America as Hermano Pablo) said to me, “God’s will is like a flashlight in the dungeon; it doesn’t shine around corners or illuminate the next cave. It only gives you enough light for the next step.”

When you are following the Lord—and when you know that it is He who is leading—you don’t have to see the whole plan. He does. You simply have to be obedient in taking the next step. At times God’s plan and purpose seem to be contrary to human logic but never contrary to His Word. When Moses led the children of Israel to the edge of the Red Sea, with the mountains shutting off a retreat on one side and the army of Egypt in hot pursuit on the other side, God’s way didn’t look sensible from a human standpoint. But Moses—knowing that he hadn’t really tested the recourses of God until he attempted to do the impossible—kept on following Him who had called him and who would eventually lead the Israelites across on dry ground.

When the wife of Albert Einstein was asked if she understood the theory of relativity, she candidly replied, “No, but Albert does. And he is to be trusted.” When you cannot see the Father’s hand, you can trust His heart, leaning on the promise of His Word.

### ***Quality #6: A Desire to Find God’s Will***

These men and women are more intent on finding the will of God than following their own plans. When Dr. James Taylor, IV was a guest on my television program, I asked him, “What is the greatest challenge confronting missionaries today?”

“Their greatest challenge,” he said, “is getting along with the others with whom they must work.” I knew he’d say that. Anyone, even those with limited experience, must have known that the greatest challenge isn’t the headhunters or the plague or the witch doctors who warn their people about how evil missionaries are. The real challenge is how to get along with the senior missionary, who may consider the question, “Have you thought about doing it another way?” as insubordination.

Missionaries are tough people! They’ve got to be; otherwise, they wouldn’t make it. We know that service isn’t for the fainthearted. But our strength can become a weakness, and what can work *for* us can also work *against* us.

Unlikely candidates for success are not wimps or “yes” people. But when they have heard the voice of God, they often take the path that is less traveled. And

this sometimes means saying “no” to a mission agenda, taking a journey alone and turning unplowed, rocky soil.

The call of God sends His successful candidates down the lonely path. At times He requires of them the unorthodox approach that will break new ground and succeed. But in studying the lives of men and women who have accomplished much for God, I see a common thread. All of them want to know what the will of God is for their personal life—not party policy or the traditional approach to a given situation—and once they have found it, they obey His will regardless of the personal cost.

How do you know when something is the will of God?

1. You have a deep feeling that God wants you to do something, and it just won't go away.
2. Prayer deepens that knowing feeling.
3. When you talk to godly individuals and they say, “Yes, this makes sense to me,” their confirmation strengthens what you feel.
4. As you move toward your goal, circumstances begin to fall in place.
5. “It is the hard road,” says Wang Ming Dao, one of the fathers of the house church movement in China.

God never leads someone contrary to what He has revealed in His Word. This means that your responsibilities as a parent are never canceled by serving your Master in some other ministry. In the will of God, duties are never in conflict.

One Christian leader learned that the hard way. Challenged by the great needs of the children who had become victims of the Korean War, he gave the work priority over his family. Choosing his way and not God's was not the pathway to success. One daughter took her life. This leader lived out the last few years of his life estranged from his wife and family, and the emotional stress diminished his effectiveness, casting a pallor over his years of accomplishment.

### ***Quality #7: Willingness to Make the Hard Decisions and Pay the Price of Loneliness***

A suburban pastor who I greatly admired learned, one week before Easter, that his music director had become involved in an inappropriate relationship with a member of the opposite sex.

In that church the presentation of the choir was an important part of the liturgy and celebration. The pastor was confronted with an issue that had to be addressed. "Why don't you wait until Easter is over, then deal with it?" some advised. But he couldn't.

On the morning that the choir was to give their presentation, a broken-hearted pastor stood before the people and announced that there would not be a presentation because of a moral issue that could not be ignored.

Lesser men would have taken the path of least resistance by waiting until the big presentation was over before dealing with it. Not this pastor. His courage—and the loneliness that he felt in the whole issue—was a reflection of the true measure of the man he was.

There is only one way you can make the tough decisions, and that is by knowing where you stand in relationship to Him who called you. Never playing to the grandstand, never taking the path that minimizes the personal cost of doing right, God's unlikely candidates are true to their convictions no matter what fallout occurs from their commitment to integrity.

Unlikely candidates for success are often lonely men and women who withdraw from the chatter of gossip and polite but meaningless conversation. They have heard the voice of their Master and are not content with small talk.

When I was a young pastor, I learned that an old Welshman, then in his nineties, was living nearby. William Willis had been a contemporary of Evan Roberts, one of the men who was mightily used of God in the Welsh Revival at the turn of the twentieth century.

I would occasionally take Brother Willis to lunch and prod him with questions about the Welsh Revival. I wanted to know what were the factors that brought it about. He would tell how he and the young men in the area who were serious about God had worked as coal miners. At the end of the day, they would meet and go up into the hills to pray together. After several hours, they would regroup and come down to the village together. But, he said, very often Evan Roberts would not be among them, and they would start looking for him—further up the mountain, still praying.

Was that part of what made this shy, unlikely candidate for success an instrument that God used to bring revival? A. W. Tozer once said, "The man who will not lead his flock up the mountainside leads it down without knowing it."

Those who pay the price of loneliness often reap the reward of sweet fellowship with the Lord in ways that others never experience. Mary Slessor is one example. After a lifetime of working in Africa, she was finally forced to return to her native Scotland. Friends noticed, however, that Mary seemed to mumble to herself. The isolation has gotten her, they thought. One of them told her that people were saying that her mental state had been affected by the rigors of Africa. "Not so!" Mary let them know. She explained that she was just talking to Jesus, that she had learned to talk with Him about everything. As C. Austin Miles wrote,

And He walks with me.  
And He talks with me,  
And tells me I am His own  
And the joy we share  
As we tarry there,  
None other has ever known.

### ***Quality #8: Character over Charisma***

Today—as perhaps never before in recent history—we are facing a crisis of character. Dishonesty has become acceptable. In the U.S., secular sources say that as high as eighty percent of high school and college students admit to cheating. Public and private morality have been separated; morality has become a private matter—not just in the U.S. but in many so-called “civilized” nations around the world. And it is out of this culture that God calls those whom He sends back into the world as light, salt and His representatives.

Studies of the lives of men and women whom God uses show that they never confuse character with charisma. They may not always have had formal education, good family connections—or charm—but they never lack character.

Two men attending the same church were talking together. One asked, “Have you heard about \_\_\_\_\_ (and he mentioned another man in the same church)?”

“No,” said the other.

“He absconded with \$500,000 in company funds and took off with his secretary. When the police found him, he was in a stolen car as well.”

“Oh, that’s terrible. I never did like that guy.”

“Yeah, but what bothers me is who’s going to teach his boy’s Sunday school class next Sunday?”

In recent days, it has not only been Sunday school teachers, but also pastors, evangelists and Christian leaders who have disgraced the body of Christ. I have been saddened and angered by the moral failures of men I have known who studied with me and whom I held in high esteem. I have often asked myself how this could have happened. Having listened to them explain with tears and regret, I've come to the conclusion that in many cases they became enamored with their own importance, consumed with busyness, and gradually lost touch with God, their wives and their own emotions.

Rationalizing what they were doing, they were blinded to the consequences of their actions, hurting not only their wives and children, but also destroying the effectiveness of future ministry and bringing reproach to the entire body of Christ.

True, there is forgiveness, and for some, restoration. But it has been my observation that when there is a moral failure, the future ministry of that person is eclipsed by the wrong. From that point on, his ministry declines and never rises higher than it was before the failure. While there is forgiveness with God and even with families, the ongoing consequences remain.

We tend to judge ourselves by our finest hour. But the world judges us by our most miserable failure. There is no grace or forgiveness from the enemies of the cross.

There is a grave danger in believing what people tell you:

"Oh, you're a wonderful speaker!"

"I've never met anyone who is as godly as you."

"Surely God spoke through you today!"

For some, however, there's no such temptation to vanity. I am thinking of a young pastor who took his first assignment in a local church. As was the custom in that church, after worship service he would go to the door and greet the people who had come. There was one man who would greet him warmly and then say, "You know, pastor, you're really something else." Every Sunday he would say the same thing, "You're really something else."

The pastor felt that there was something about the man's remark that didn't quite ring true. So one day he said, "You know, every Sunday you say the same thing, but what do you really mean?"

The man smirked and said, "Well, you know pastor, you're not much of a preacher so you must really be something else!"

Whatever their faults—and they have many—God's unlikely candidates for success have it straight; character and charisma are not confused.

A young Korean with his American wife and baby boy stepped up to the counter at Trans-World Airlines at the airport in San Francisco one day. He explained that nine years before he had flown on a child's ticket when, in fact, he was seventeen years old, and he now wanted to pay the difference between that and an adult ticket.

The ticket agent, who didn't know what to do, called his supervisor. After hearing the explanation, the supervisor called the manager, who called TWA's headquarters in St. Louis. They couldn't believe that someone was so honest that he actually wanted to recompense them for a nine-year old debt!

That young man standing in front of the counter was no ordinary person. He was on his way home to Korea where he was destined to become one of Asia's outstanding Christian leaders. Several years later, he stood beside Billy Graham in Seoul, interpreting Graham's message to over a million people, then the largest crowd ever assembled to hear the gospel. His name was Billy Kim.

Billy Kim was a teenager when the Korean War broke out. When his father died and his school was bombed, Billy decided to join the American troops, shining boots, washing mess kits and foraging for better food. When an American sergeant named Carl Powers took a liking to Billy, he asked him, "Billy, how would you like to go to America?"

It didn't take long to decide. A soldier in his outfit had a Sears and Roebuck catalog, and Billy had not only read it but studied every page of it. *If America is that good*, he thought, *I want to go there*. Billy's mother tearfully agreed to let her boy go to America.

Arriving in San Francisco at Christmas in 1951, Billy thought he had stepped inside the gates of heaven. The lights were dazzling, the food was abundant, and it seemed everyone had more than enough. But his euphoria soon turned to reality. He had to go from San Francisco to a Virginia town where his sponsor lived, and he didn't have enough money.

Fearing that Billy might get lost because he spoke little English, the ticket agent from the bus company wouldn't sell him a ticket. So friends pinned a note on his uniform that said, "To whom it may concern: Send this boy to Route 1, Box 75,

Danville, Virginia," bought him a child's ticket on TWA, and told him that if anyone asked how old he was, he was to say he didn't speak English.

Billy thought he did, but the G.I. English he spoke had to be unlearned quickly! When he arrived at Bob Jones University, he shocked his teacher with his display of profanity which Billy thought was the English everyone spoke in America.

At the university, Billy Kim invited Jesus Christ into his life and began attending the Youth for Christ meetings on weekends, preaching and telling his story. That's when Billy and I became lifelong friends.

Today, this former shoeshine boy serves as president of the Far East Broadcasting Company in Korea, pastor of the 15,000-strong Suwon Baptist Church and president of the Baptist World Alliance. He declined an invitation to go into politics, choosing instead to proclaim the Good News that changed his life. And if you are wondering, the home office of TWA airlines was so taken aback by Billy Kim's honesty that they said, "Forget it. It's our contribution to a good cause."

### ***Quality #9: Learning from Mistakes***

Unlikely candidates do make mistakes—many mistakes. Only the person who does nothing has no failures, so people who attempt many things will fail at some of them. Some mistakes could be avoided with the benefit of education and training. But those who lack that training "keep going anyway," making mistakes but seldom making the same mistake twice.

Someone once said that failure is success turned inside out. Unlikely candidates climb the ladder, rung by rung, and eventually get to where they think God wants them to go.

Even God's choice servants, like Abraham, make mistakes, yet they are mistakes of judgment, not character. And there is a difference. They may underestimate the cost of a project, fail to provide adequate resources for it, take the wrong road or misjudge the weather, but they have adopted the mind-set of Paul, who said,

"Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." (2 Corinthians 4:2)

## ***Quality #10: Servanthood***

In the upper room, Jesus shed His outer garments and, taking a basin and towel, washed the feet of the disciples—a task done by a servant, who occupied the lowest rung on the social ladder. Whoa! Just a minute! We want to be recognized and praised, but washing feet—or clothes or scrubbing toilets—aren't jobs that appeal to any of us.

In 1948, Whittaker Chambers went before a New York grand jury to witness against Alger Hiss, a government official who was accused of communist involvement. During his testimony one of the jurors leaned forward and asked, "What does it mean to be a communist?"

Chambers, who himself had been a communist, replied that when he was committed to communism, he had three heroes. The first was a Pole, a political prisoner who was imprisoned in Warsaw. He insisted on cleaning the latrines because he believed that the most developed member of the community should take upon himself the lowliest task, as an example to others. "That," said Chambers, "is one of the things it means to be a communist."

His second hero, he said, was a German Jew who had been captured in a revolt in Bavaria. When he was sentenced to death by a judge, he retorted, "No, we communists are always under the sentence of death."

His third hero was a Russian who was exiled to Siberia. He took his sentence cheerfully, grateful that he could pay a price for what he believed. "That is what it means to be a communist," he said.

While communism has collapsed in the former Soviet Union under the weight of its economic and spiritual failure, the deep commitment that some of its members had was the kind of commitment we find in unlikely candidates for success. Men and women used by God have learned that whatever is to be done is to be done as unto the Lord. When they see a need, they address it. When there is someone hurting, they reach out to that person.

While he was president of Denver Seminary, Dr. Vernon Grounds challenged a class of graduates to learn to serve. At the end of his message, he presented each student with two things: a Bible and a small hand towel. He explained that the Bible provides the words of life, and the towel symbolizes God's call for His servants to do just that—serve.

God's unlikely candidates serve in hospitals, jails, churches, schools (some as teachers, others as janitors), centers for the aged, far away places, and their own homes. Where there is a need, they fill it.

The following account gives a picture of a servant's heart:

Doug Nichols describes it as "what seminary can't teach." It's one of the lessons learned in the school of experience that is otherwise described as "the school of hard knocks." In 1967, Doug was serving as a missionary in India. When he contracted tuberculosis, he was eventually sent to a sanitarium to recuperate.

Though he was living on a support scale not much higher than the nationals who also were hospitalized in the government sanitarium, people thought that because he was an American he had to be rich. Doug said, "They didn't know that I was just as broke as they were!"

While in the hospital Doug tried reaching out to some of the patients, but his efforts were rebuffed. When he offered tracts or Gospels of John, he was politely refused. It was obvious that the patients wanted nothing to do with him or his God. Discouragement set in and Doug began to wonder why God had allowed him to be there anyway.

Doug would often be awakened in the night by the rasping sound of coughing, both his own and others. But then, what would you expect in the TB ward of a sanitarium? Unable to sleep because of his raspy cough, early one morning Doug noticed an old man trying to sit up on the edge of the bed, but because of weakness, he would fall back. Exhausted, the old man finally lay still and sobbed. Early the next morning the scene was repeated. Then, later in the morning, the stench that began to permeate the ward certified the obvious: the old man had been unsuccessfully trying to get up and go to a restroom.

Says Doug, "The nurses were extremely agitated and angry because they had to clean up the mess. One of the nurses, in her anger, even slapped him. The man, terribly embarrassed, just curled up in a ball and wept."

The next morning—again about 2:00 a.m.—Doug noticed the old man was trying unsuccessfully to generate enough strength to get out of bed. This time though, without thinking, Doug got out of bed, went over to where the old man was, put one arm under his head and neck and the other under his legs, and gently carried him to the restroom. When he had finished, again Doug carried him back to his bed.

But what happened after that is what makes this story. The old man, speaking in a language which Doug didn't understand, thanked him profusely, and then...gently kissed him on the cheek.

The story doesn't end there, either. Eventually Doug drifted off to an uneasy sleep. In the morning he awakened to a steaming cup of tea served to him by another patient who spoke no English. After the patient served the tea, he made motions indicating that he wanted one of the tracts Doug kept with him.

"Throughout the day," says Doug, "people came to me, asking for the Gospel booklets. This included the nurses, the hospital interns, the doctors, until everyone in the hospital had a tract, booklet, or Gospel of John. Over the next few days," he adds, "several indicated they trusted Christ as Savior as a result of reading the Good News!"

A final thought: The world doesn't care how much you have or what you know; they want to know how much you care. "I simply took an old man to the bathroom," says Doug, adding, "Anyone could have done that!" (From the author's book, *Heroes: People Who Made A Difference in Our World*, Promise Press, Ulrichsville, OH, pp. 29-31, used by permission.)

You can be an unlikely candidate who can accomplish a full measure of what God wants you to do! Why not get started today?

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Harold Sala, well-known speaker, author, Bible teacher, and founder/president of Guidelines, Inc. is the featured speaker on his daily radio program, "Guidelines—a Five-Minute Commentary on Living" which is broadcast on over 600 radio stations in 100 countries and translated into 16 languages. He also writes a daily column for four newspapers in Manila, and another column that appears in *Women's*, a bi-monthly magazine, also in Manila. The author of 33 books and more than 60 booklets, Dr. Sala travels the world as guest lecturer and teacher at conferences, seminars, churches, and seminaries. The Salas reside in Mission Viejo, California.