

God Uses Ordinary People

By Ron Hafer

Speaker 1:

Good morning. Welcome to Second Chapel, where you guys set up with us, as we seeing today.

[Everyday by Hillsong United is preformed]

I just want to read this quote to you guys. It says, Faith is about singing and worshipping even when we can't hear God. God wants us to believe him, believe in him, no matter what our senses tell us, no matter what our tangible experiences. I just want to encourage you guys that a lot of times we don't feel God and we are promised that he is with us, though. So no matter what, even whether you feel him or you don't, just to continue worshipping, God through singing, especially right now, today and just throughout the rest of your lives, too.

[Enough by Chris Tomlin is performed]

Lord, we thank you that you've just supplied yourself for us and that you've made it enough for us. And we thank you for who you are and we're grateful that there is no one like you. Amen.

[There is None Like You by Lenny LeBlanc; Doxology (Praise God, From Whom All Blessings Flow) by Thomas Ken are performed]

Speaker 2:

Amen, would you remain standing with me for prayer?

(Sighs) Father, how right and fitting it is for us to start out this first Chapter two of 2007 is simply lifting up all praise to you; all praise be to you, Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Father, what an amazing thought it is for us to think about all creatures here below. God, all of your creation, the scripture says, will give you praise. And Lord, everything you have made is praising you. But God, what a unique privilege we have as humans to be able to take that and turn it into conscious worship. Father, I pray for the empowering of your Holy Spirit in each and every one of our lives. Lord, to take that heart attitude of praise to which you are due and to turn it into conscious, reflective, active worship. Total life worship. Total soul worship; in every situation and every thought, in every class and every conversation, with every step, with every breath. Lord God, you are worthy of all of our worship. I pray that you would teach us to lift up our souls to you. And so we give you all these things and ask your blessing over this chapel today for the sake of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

You may be seated. Rachel Clarke is going to read a verse of scripture in just a second to introduce Ron, but before she does, it is kind of freaky for me to be introducing my boss to you.

Hafer: God Uses Ordinary People

(Laughs) I've been talking with Ron in the chaplain's office now, this is my second year. And don't let his stature fool you. He is a big man on campus. Ron is the, both the tallest and the shortest chaplain in Bible is history. He's also the best and the worst chaplain in Biola history. He's going to kill me because I'm stealing all of his jokes here. He's the only chaplain in Biola's history. He is in his 40th year as chaplain here. Amen, praise the Lord.

[Audience Applause]

Praise the Lord. Just what a legacy of faithfulness. And he's also in his 40th year of marriage to his lovely wife, Hilda. And I don't know which is, which is the greater feat. But they're both incredible acts of faithfulness to God. So Rachel's gonna bring a word of scripture hear, and Ron here for our chaplain is gonna (audio fades out).

Rachel Clarke:

Good morning. Hear the word of the Lord out of Acts 9, Saul, Saul's conversion story. Acts 9:1-9, "Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus so that if he found any there who belonged to the way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey. Suddenly, a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, Saul, Saul, Why do you persecute me? Who are you, Lord? Saul asked. I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, he replied. Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do. The men

traveling with Saul stood there speechless. They heard the sound but did not see anyone. Sol got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes, he could not see anything. So they led him by his hand into Damascus. And for three days, he was blind and did not eat or drink anything."

Ron Hafer:

Whoo! Thank you, Rachel Clarke. Good morning. Happy New Year. I asked several people who are authorities, at what point can you no longer say Happy New Year, like is it the end of February? And the best answer was when it's no longer a happy new year. So there you go. Thank you, Rachel Clarke. I think. Thank you, Andrew, for the lovely introduction. There went his Christmas bonus. That's for sure. I am always delighted. This was kind of a work of frustration in a way, because I'm usually in chapel one. It just kind of way it shakes down. And I left chapel one during very tough (microphone adjustment noises). You know what? You think (adjustment noises continued, followed by scattered laughing). During Eric tennis's message he had notes (inaudible due to adjusting noises), but it's okay because [inaudible]. So we can turn this off, and I can use this

There we are. Good morning and happy New Year.

[Audience Laughter]

I'm convinced that God still uses usual, regular, ordinary people to do his extraordinary work. I think that may be my standing before you is at least a strong visual aid of that. Our family, which has kind of an ordinary history, just a bunch of pagans that got saved; my dad was

the town. He said, when you tell the story. Don't say my dad drank a little. He said, tell it the way it was. He was the town alcoholic. And my mom, who went to church regularly, but she actually enjoyed partying and then getting down. We were a pagan group. My brother and I were in and out of juvenile hall, my brother, more often than I. My brother actually came to Faith in Christ while he was on home leave from juvenile hall. Really! I mean, so we're just--and when we tell our family story, I'm not I'm just using it to illustrate that God uses regular, ordinary folks.

My dad says tell this story as we think this took place in heaven. God was saying, I'm, to the angels, here's the way I extend grace to the people on the planet, to the humans. How do you do that, Lord, says the Angel. This isn't chapter and verse. This is just hypothetical. Cut me a little slack, Jack. So he says to the angels. Take a look on the late great planet Earth, find a premiere pagan family, and then I'll, then I'll show you what I do with my grace. And so they didn't have to convene. They said, oh, we've already thought about it. It's the Hafers, the pagan Hafers. And God said, so what I'm going to do, I'm going to save them and then that'll prove that I'm a God of grace. Because if God can save the Hafers, he can save anybody.

God uses normal, regular, ordinary people to do his extraordinary work. In a sense, those Saul of Tarsus was not was not ordinary, but he certainly wasn't what you would call a flaming evangelical; out doing the work of the Lord. Little Small of Tarsus was a hostage taker, a Christian killer, and who in the world--other than God, how odd of God to choose small, or you, or me for his work. So how, how does he do that? Well, he brings a lot of us together and allows us to look in a passage from scripture. That's very, very ordinary and common. But maybe we'll be able to pull at least a principal or two from this, as they say in, at Talbot Seminary where I graduated, in the moments that remain. And they said when you're preaching, say, throughout things like the next few moments. Although, you know, it goes till, till 11:15. It just kind of

builds false hope, you know, and they think maybe that guy's going to land the plane a little bit early.

So in what way does God use regular, normal, ordinary folks? All evangelists have a plane story. Would you like to hear mine? Thank you, because it's in my notes. I'm flying back from--doesn't matter, but it was Detroit, Michigan. Plane was delayed so we were in a little holding area. And actually, they in this little VIP room, they brought whatever drink you ordered. I mean, whatever drink you ordered. I had orange juice, (laughs) thank you very much. And across from me, a little, a little lady, probably the littlest person that I'd ever seen for years. I mean, like less than five feet tall. I'm a strapping five, six. So I towered over her, and I saw her and she's sipping coffee and she was reading a huge Bible. I thought at the time that Bible's bigger than the little mama, you know. And next to me was a young man that he would, he had a chain with some, some medals on and during the 15 minutes that we were in the VIP room--it's the only time in my life I was ever in the VIP, I said, does anybody have a camera take a picture of me in the VIP room!

So during this time, I see this young man and his and his--when I tell a story about anyone like this, I make fun of no human being. It's just what happened. His eyes rolled back and his head rolled, and it looked like he was going to speak in tongues or you know, that, and his arms didn't move. But he and I realized that he actually was passing out. I'd been with a kid in high school that had seizures, petite mal seizures, and that's what happened. I actually saw him go through a couple of these--10 or 15 minutes. He's traveling by himself. So I figured, okay, he's, he's cool. He'll be, he'll be fine and he, and he did. And he came out of these little kind of like a trance, and, and just kind of handled. I don't think anybody else in the (fancy voice) V--did I mention it was VIP? I don't think anybody else was there even realized what had happened. We

got on the plane. The little lady with a huge Bible sat right behind me. She had a mink coat. Unbe--I'm--I didn't kill the animal. I'm just telling the story, you know, don't get after me. She bought the thing, maybe it as a gift. I don't know. But it, I. Very expensive. And there she was with her mink coat. It was winter. So people were wrapped fairly snugly even on the plane. And my buddy, this young man sat right across from me. I was in the aisle. He's right across from me.

They immediately serve food because they, the flight was late and they were pacifying us. His food came. My food had just come, and it was one of these little noodles soufflé. I don't know. Anyway, it was kind of messy, okay. His tray was put down and he had (snaps) immediately had one of these seizures and his his knee (laughs) I was going to illustrate and it'd be just like me to whack the pulpit and everything flying. But his knee hit the little flimsy tray and his food spilled. He had milk and he was actually drinking it and he had a kind of a little scuzzy beard. He looked like he needed a wife, you know, (laughs) and somebody. And anyway, so he, and so he spilled the milk on on his sweater and on his beard. He was he was out, and the tray was gone and the food was everywhere. And I said, oh, my. How terrible. I think the gift developed, you know. The lady behind me who had not yet been served Got up with her mink coat still on, knelt in the aisle, in that, the coat was, it was ruined, knelt in the aisle and was scraping the food into a tray. I realized later so that he wouldn't be embarrassed. She turned to me and she said, Do you have a napkin? Duh. So you know? So I handed it to her and she put some water on it. She sat on the arm of the chair while a flight, a lady was coming. And when the guy came to all this took place in about 15 seconds, you say. But you've told--taken five minutes to tell it. Never mind. She's holding the rag on his four head. So it just kind of so, you know, so he wouldn't be embarrassed. And he actually kind of realized what had happened. And she said, we've, we've ordered you another meal, which they did. And he didn't actually even say anything

to her. I think he was terribly embarrassed. The, they brought him another meal. There was there wasn't another incident the rest of the flight.

I got to her during the flight they had, it was a little bit larger plane. They had one of those--well, it's a bar, you know but they have a lot of things, coffee and orange juice... I went and I sat and there she was. We were talking she had taken the coat off. I'm sure they just threw it away. I mean, it was just ruined. And I said to her, I introduced myself and I said, that was an amazing thing that happened. And she said, she, she was just very embarrassed, she blushed beet red and I said, your coat is ruined, isn't it? So that doesn't matter. She said, I was very concerned. And we talked and I said, I just figured, if she's not a Christian, she should be. So I just said, (yelling) turn or burn!

[Audience Laughter]

No, I said, are you are you a Christian? Turn or burn! You know, just, I witness in a clever way. Then she said, Yes, yes, I am. I said, so am I. Oh, what do you do? I said, I'm a chaplain (laughs) I'm a care and concern person, you know? And she grabbed my arm with her little scrawny, and she said, all of my life I've prayed, God, if you just let me preach the word, I'd be so happy. But he, he just never seems to allow that. So I grabbed her little scrawny arm. We actually would arm wrestle. No, no, no. Never mind. And I said, I said, you know what? What you just did was such a phenomenal act of the grace of God, and the power of God through, from one life to another. And I said, that's going to preach all over the world. I said, I'll tell you why. Because I'm I'm a motor mouth. I'm a preacher. I'm going to tell it wherever I am (laughs). I fulfilled my job. I fulfilled my obligation. Well, how does God determine who's going to do great

things and who's going to be somewhat insignificant? Probably the same way he determines if the power mine is or isn't going to work. He's sovereign. He's sovereign.

Rachel has read the passage of scripture. I do not feel at all negative about not finishing the passage because everyone takes the book of Acts and what I've omitted. You will all get or have gotten from your notes. But I want to jump in from where Rachel left off. You already know the story of the conversion of little Saul of Tarsus on his 15 years, at least maybe 20, says [inaudible] that I had to read during my time at Talbot. Since Jesus has died, was buried and rose again Paul has been out hassling believers, actually killing Christians, and now God has gotten his attention in a rather amazing way. My wife and I just went over the weekend to see the Nativity again with half of Biola, by the way. Yes, at the little El Cheapo one, Dalhart Theater. Right? They all, all the students waved at me and said hey Ron, pretty exciting, come and sit with this down front. I said, no, I'm and I'm going to sit in the back so my wife and I can dip during the service (laughs).

[Audience Laughter]

But. But, but we didn't. We didn't because it was a religious... Well, there was a point (laughs) never mind.

[Audience Laughter]

Where... okay, where was I? Oh yes. Yes. Visions, visions! There were, there were visions, and not only did, at what point did I lost it at the mic. Okay, so Saul I is now on his way to Damascus. But folks, his mission is changed. He's a little Christian killer that's blind and has, he's kind of lost his--no pun intended--his sense of direction in life. What am I going to do? Hostage takers don't work well when they're blind. I think it's interesting that the Holy Spirit tells us that the people traveling with him heard voices and noises, but they didn't see anything. I think God has an incredible sense of humor, throwing in little things like that. So Saul gets to Damascus. There's a guy named Judas. If you're an upperclassman, you already know it's Judas of Damascus, not Judas Iscariot or one of the other 15 in the New Testament. But normally when I'm teaching this and I ask if people even know the house where Saul of Tarsus went when he arrived in Damascus. Most people, unless they've heard Rachel Clarke reading with power and authority, they don't know. And I, and I want more information that is given. I believe that this is the word of God. It's inspired. It's all we need. But I, I would like more. And I if I were Judas, Judas of Damascus, I would, I would like to know how God said to him, because that's, that isn't included. Judas, good job, dude. You're serving me. Yes. Your house is my house. You're open to anything. Yes. Well, you're going to have a guess. Really wonderful. Yes. He's out there. They're on their way. Oh, thank you very much, how long will he be here? Now, he'll be here for for a while. You... do have a name, Lord? Yes. It's a Saul of Tarsus. We'll we were not even told about their conversation; Judas of Damascus, but he's. Who knew? Who knew his name?

If people had gave testimonies. Let's have a popcorn testimony tonight in the First Baptist Church of Damascus. Does anybody have a story? Yeah, my name is Judas of Damascus. Well, they were all of Damascus. And I would like to just share that I, that God spoke to me. And everybody knows now that the apostle Paul is preaching all over. But actually, when I met him,

he was blind and came, whoa, what is, what a story that would be? Well, I'm picking it up from there. Quit looking at your watches. I know how much time there is. We will land this plane with time to spare. All right. Here we go. Let's see, Rachel. You left off in verse 9, "in Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias," this is another one of the kind of no names; not Ananias of Acts 5 who's already, he and his lovely wife, have already gone home to be with the Lord, a bit early. As a students in my class used to say they've taken the spiritual dirt nap. But this is another. This is another Ananias. This is an Ananias who probably went to Promise Keepers and they said, who here will stand and say, I'll serve the Lord? I'll serve you Lord. You'll go wherever I send you. I'll go. You'll preach when I say preach; I'll preach, Lord. I'll pray. I'll sing, whatever you want. God says good. You're the Ananias I thought.

Ananias, the Lord called him with a vision, Ananias, I've checked this, every time there's a vision there's always a loud call of the person's name. They want to make absolutely sure it's you. Oh, woah, me? Yeah, are there any other Ananiases? Yeah, that's you, buddy. Here's the vision from God. We don't know Judas', but we know Ananias'. Yes, Lord, he answered. You're the one committed to me? I am. The Lord told him. Go to the House of Judas on Straight Street. I think he knew him because he didn't seem to ask any questions, or he could have been scared to death. And ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul for he is praying. Saul of Tarsus is praying in your buddy Judas' house. It doesn't, it doesn't compute. I mean, we know the story. Come on. Sunday school quarterly number seven. You know, this stuff. You say, it's the answer is he's there either Ananias or Judas when they ask the question or Jesus. Okay. And then they, they, he says there, he's there and he's. Oh yeah, you've got a street called Straight. Yes. S for a man from Tarsus named Saul, he's praying in a vision. Vision? He's used to that. He's seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.

Do you think, just a guess, do you think Ananias had ever done this in his life? Was he the town healer? I doubt it. I doubt it. I think Ananias was so stunned and Ananias actually maybe has the conversation that Judas of Damascus had just a little bit before. Here's Ananias' conversation. Lord, you're running the unit. This is Hafer, not on the market, okay. Just a little imaginary. You're, you're very busy, Lord. You're sovereign. You're you know, you're keeping the plan that's up there and everything. So you could miss things once in a while. So I'm going to fill you in. See this? Here's what's gone down. This Saul of Tarsus is bad news. He's not on your team, Lord. He's bad. He's a bad guy. And he just kind of instructs the Lord God that, that this is maybe not a good idea. And God says, right. No, no. The Lord said to Ananias, go! No, there wasn't any, he didn't stutter. This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles, (astonished sound) and Kings and before the people of Israel I will show him, Saul of Tarsus, later to be named Paul, how much he must suffer for my name.

Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. I love this. There's not I don't know. Do you have a sanctified imagination? Do you wonder? He goes and maybe knocks. One guy said with a, with a soft sponge and, when no one answered he was ready to leave. But Judas went yo, yo. Ananias, dude. (Whispering) Yeah. Yeah. Do you have a guest? Yeah. You'll never believe who it is. Let me guess, Saul of Tarsus, and he's blind. Right. God sent me. You're not gonna believe this. Where is he? Back in the back room. What's he doing? He's praying. Has he eaten anything, hasn't eaten for three days. Listen, if God struck me blind in a vision, I think I would lose my appetite as well. And Ananias said, well, I'm, God has sent me. He sent me here to actually minister. Well, come on. And here is Saul and Ananias just goes in the room. He introduces himself (laughs). Saul might have thought, well, that he's blind. But you know he's his list, he says your, your number three on my list. I was going to nail you day after tomorrow. You

know, I was gonna throw you in jail. And who knows? I mean, Saul knew this community and he knew what he's after. Saul might have said, you know, Judas, he was number five, you know.

So here's Ananias, who has his conversation with Saul of Tarsus. I love this. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, brother Saul Whoa, that's a statement of faith. I mean, he's his brothering before the Holy Spirit has come on him. I don't know if the apostle Paul--I'm sure he raised his hands because he's Jewish. Andrew would probably think he spoke in tongues. We don't know that. I don't know all of the things that went down. But I know he wasn't used to that phrase. Brother Saul. Whoa. You're placing me in the faith community. Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here, has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit. It's interesting when you read commentators; those are people who write nine pages on one verse from Scripture. When you read them there, they're not really agreed on whether Saul of Tarsus had any clue actually what happened when the Holy Spirit came upon people other than he witnessed the stoning of Stephen. And I think that was on his mind every day; as he's guarding the cloaks of the Stephen killers, the word of God tells us earlier that Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit and power, and he just spoke powerfully in the name of the Lord. And actually, before they killed him, he let them know that he was looking right in the face of the Lord Jesus. Here's small of Tarsus, ex-Christian killer now being placed in the family of faith, at least by statement, and he's been told, I'm going to place my hands on you. You're going get your sight back. Well, that's, that's exciting if you're blind again. I'm not saying that without respect to those without site. But, but the next part, I don't think Saul really had a clue what was going to happen, because once this happened, the Spirit of God came on him and he was never, he was never the same.

So I have a question that I want to ask you. What happens, Biola? What happens? What would happen if we, not all believers in the world, not even the ones in (sarcastically) Chapel one, but just we right here in this time and place in space and history? We decided, Lord, I will, I will live for you. I would, I will walk with you. What would happen if God's Holy Spirit moved in on us and stretched us beyond our comfort zones and took us to phenomenal new places, what, what would have to change? In what way would God, the Holy Spirit, stretch you to be what he wants you to be? The reason I ask that question, in conclusion, which is always good for two more minutes, which I have according to the digital clock, is because in verse 31--we won't exegete it--but in verse thirty one God the Holy Spirit through, Dr. Luke tells us at this time the church was experiencing peace. There's one reason why they were experiencing peace. The major Christian killer has been taken out of business for a while. So that's one reason why they experience peace; and growth, God, may God, the Holy Spirit, give us that as we open our lives to him, and growth. But here, here's the grabber. This is what's this is what's worth the price of admission this morning. Thirty thousand is that what you pay for?

Here's what I'd like to conclude with, because it's right straight out of the scripture. I've taught Acts a bunch of times; when I saw this, I got so excited, I said, I'm going to preach this and I am, in conclusion. As they're moving about in the power of the Holy Spirit, scripture says they are encouraged and they're strengthened by the Holy Spirit. You say that's nice, they're encouraged strengthened. It almost sounds like the same. It's not, it's not. The encouragement part, it's the, it's the Greek word picture. I know I spent three years working on this one. It's a Greek word picture of the Holy Spirit of God, who is just really walking side by side kind of whispering as I picture Jesus. No disrespect saying, hang in there, Ron. Give you a high five. It's the encouragement from the Holy Spirit. But the strengthened is--so when I saw this it, well if it

didn't change my life, it at least changed the sermon outline. This is straight from a Greek word study. Listen to this. This is so good. It means that your muscles and ligaments are actually set free for increased freedom of movement.

I go to the gym. I mean, I'm sorry. It's all I have to illustrate with, okay? Come on. Come on. You know, we each do our part, okay. Then at the gym, you know, there are people that are pumping iron and everybody, everybody is doing their own thing. That's not, that's not the reference to strength here. My wife, I love my wife dearly. My wife Hilda, my only wife. Why isn't Hilda here? You say, should I do it one more time? I will. Hilda's not here because she thinks it's unfair that she has to write the message and then have me butcher it before 800 people. Never mind. My wife has some back trouble. Pray for my wife. You know, she, I married this older woman. Well, I'm this older guy. Then she goes the chiropractor for 40 bucks a crack (laughs). And at the chiropractor, at the chiropractor, there is a point where he's adjusting her and he says it's just so wonderful, you'll get this (crack noises). On occasion, I've awakened with a sore neck and I can't move it, and it won't go away. And I'm, I'm a little wuss. I don't like doctors, but I've gone. I don't like chiropractors, although I knew that I had to do it. And I said to the guy, you're going to eventually get (cracking noises) on me. He says, no, no, just relax. No, I said, there's gonna be a time and you're going to be at least one. Oh yeah. No problem. Just relax. And he's manipulating and he's just... and then, but there's a point and I. But he usually gets me talking or he's talking and then, but there's that point. Have you ever been through that (cracking noises)? And although it doesn't feel great when it happens, after it's done, then I say thank you. Thank you. But it was painful and you should've warned me. But that's actually that's the word here. Acts 1:8 says you'll receive power. That is not, that's not the word here. The word here is,

along with the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, God, the Holy Spirit, freeing us, allowing us to stretch and do things that we haven't done, freeing us for brand new movement and stretch.

What does God have for you? I don't know, but he does. Does he use regular, ordinary, normal, ordinary folks? He does, all the time. Are you open to what the spirit of God might want to do? I know you'll be encouraged. But I challenge you to allow him to. Will you allow me to say (cracking noises) stretch you; do the do the adjustment and allow you to be free to do things you could never do. I say this at the end of my messages, this is the end. When you have a story to tell of the grace of God and what he's done in your life, let me know, because I'm writing the book and I'll put you in it. We're all part of God's chapter.

Thank you, Father, for your goodness and Your Grace. Thank you for little small of Tarsus that was converted into the apostle Paul; this amazing, amazing scripture writer, missionary, pastor, church-planter. Lord God in this building, in this place, may you find a ton of potential and may you move among us, encourage us, and strengthen us to stretch outside of our comfort zone to be what you would have us to be in. Jesus strong name, I pray, and all God's people said. Amen.

By the authority vested in me, you are dismissed from this chapel.