

**Series: *WHEN GOD CHOSE WEAKNESS*—December 24, 2009**

**JESUS: SMALL AND HELPLESS  
Luke 2:1-7**

1. Kids **love** Christmas! There are a lot of things about it that make it special. The decorations. The cookies. The gifts. Relatives. The gifts. Time off school. Did I mention—the gifts? There are special concerts in school, Christmas parties, family traditions, decorations—lots of things to get them excited about this celebration.

-And in church gatherings like this—all over the world—kids will dress up in their Dad's bathrobes, wear funny looking hats and paper crowns—and the story of Jesus' birth will be told, retold—and re-retold. Of course, sometimes kids get the facts a little mixed up.

-One woman writes about praying for children for 5 years—and then God answering by blessing she and her husband with four children in four years. Blessed right into poverty. She says that she tried to keep a good attitude about it all. Like when they smashed 2 dozen eggs on the floor looking for baby chicks. And when they started a hotel for homeless frogs in the spare bedroom (it took 2 hours to catch all 23 frogs). But one of her most memorable moments came in the children's Christmas pageant. She describes it like this:

**My daughter was playing Mary, two of my sons were shepherds and my youngest son was a wise man. This was their moment to shine. My five-year-old shepherd had practiced his line, "We found the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes." But he was nervous and said, "The baby was wrapped in wrinkled clothes."**

**My four-year-old "Mary" said, "That's not 'wrinkled clothes,' silly. That's dirty, rotten clothes." A wrestling match broke out between Mary and the shepherd and was stopped by an angel, who bent her halo and lost her left wing. I slouched a little lower in my seat when Mary dropped the doll representing Baby Jesus, and it bounced down the aisle crying, "Mama-mama." Mary grabbed the doll, wrapped it back up and held it tightly as the wise men arrived. My other son stepped forward wearing a bathrobe and a paper crown, knelt at the manger and announced, "We are the three wise men, and we are bringing gifts of gold, common sense and fur." The congregation dissolved into laughter, and the pageant got a standing ovation. "I've never enjoyed a Christmas program as much as this one," laughed the pastor, wiping tears from his eyes. "For the rest of my life, I'll never hear the Christmas story without thinking of gold, common sense and fur." "My children are my pride and my joy and my greatest blessing," I said as I dug through my purse for an aspirin.**

2. The birth of Jesus is told **very** simply in the Bible. Let me read it for you:

**At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) All returned to their own ancestral towns to**

register for this census. And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. He took with him Mary, his fiancée, who was now obviously pregnant. And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them. (Luke 2:1-7 NLT)

-The story of Jesus' birth—as simply as it's told in the Bible—is one even kids can understand. And they can relate to it. In this story—they're not the smallest and most helpless people in the room; Jesus is. God became a baby. Human babies are more helpless and more dependent than any other newborn creatures on the planet. Ever seen a fawn or a calf? They're on their feet immediately after birth! Baby whales are born—and they swim. Human babies are born—and they just lay there and cry! Within a year, fawns, calves—even turkeys are pretty much on their own. Humans? It's measured in decades, not months!

-But the story goes deeper than the fact that a baby was born and laid in a manger. John, one of Jesus' closest friends and followers puts it like this in his narrative of Jesus' life, based on first hand evidence:

**In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God...He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him...The Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son. (John 1:1,10,14 NLT)**

-At its core, the Christmas story is about the day when the Creator of all became a **baby**. It's about when God—who defines the word *infinite*—became finite. I know, I know--I talk about this a lot; but the truth is that I have never quite gotten over how astounding it is. Like the kids in these pageants, He fumbled with his first words. Like them, his hands were chubby and clumsy—and dropped things. This one who created the human brain—didn't understand how it worked.

-**That** night, the night He was born—some 2000 years ago—he came into this world like any other baby. His face squeezed and red, his eyes swollen, his hair wet and sticky. He needed to be prodded to breathe, wiped off; he needed to wear that culture's version of a diaper. And he mostly slept—unless he was hungry, then he screamed. Strange, isn't it, to think of God--with **needs**.

-And that was how He chose to make the transition from the unimaginable of eternity—to the ordinary. Wrapped tight with strips of old cloth to keep him warm, his limbs straight. So helpless that unless someone fed him, he'd starve; unless someone carried him—he went **no where!** Vulnerable to cold, disease, germs—and **any** predator.

3. Maybe at the core of this story is the question—**How DO you make an entrance?** As God, He certainly knew what the future would be like. He could've arrived full-grown in a Hummer! Or in a fully armed Apache helicopter. As God? Well, the sky's the limit.

You can do anything you want. He could've burned his image into the rock of local mountain range—or created a new galaxy that spelled His Name in stars.

-But God seems to prefer subtlety. Understatement. Hiddenness. I mean, if it was me or you—we'd try to think up **something** a little more impressive than arrive in the middle of the night as six pounds of screaming baby—still attached to your Mom by an umbilical cord, right?

- a. The rulers of that day didn't take that approach. They worked hard to impress people. Caesar Augustus—proclaimed himself as the Prince of Peace—and made peace by slaughtering anyone who objected to his leadership. Herod, the local king? He took out his own sons when he thought they might pose a threat. Augustus said, "It's safer to be Herod's pig than his son!" He even tried to kill Jesus while He was still a toddler.
- b. But **impress** was not what the Son chose to do. See, He was identifying with us. Anyone here who didn't enter the world as a small, helpless baby—like, you came full-grown?

-Growing up is about moving ourselves **out** of the helpless, vulnerable category—and that's good. But anyone who has ever been—or still is—small, vulnerable and helpless can relate to Jesus. In fact, throughout His life, Jesus challenged our tendency to power up, strut our stuff, be more important than we are, our make sure everyone notices us.

4. Would I be overstating things to say that one of the feelings human beings hate the **most** is feeling helpless? Or small and vulnerable and weak? Or insignificant? I've always hated being short. I mean, I'm not **that** short—I'm 5' 9"—actually, 5' 8 ½--to be totally honest. One of my daughter's most important goals in life was to be taller than me. When she was about 20, her doctor told her, "The bad news, Kelly, is that you've **stopped** growing. The **good** news is that your Dad will start shrinking." She laughed when she told me. I didn't.

- a. In our world, people would rather **die** than allow themselves to be appropriately small...and vulnerable. It's a fact, actually. People will almost always tell you that they are taller than they really are, weigh less (or more) than they do. Given half a chance, we tell each other stories that imply that we're smarter than we really are, know more than we really do, and are more important than we really are.

-We know **just** how to craft our story in ways that remind others that they are quite fortunate to know us! We **PhotoShop** the details of life so that we get up earlier, work harder, spend...and sleep less than we actually do. We want others to think that we're noble; one of the more generous, profound, and intelligent people in this world.

-In a world that worships youth, we even work **very, VERY** hard to imply that we're younger—losing less brain cells and fluids than we really have. I had this one blown out of the water last week. Lori and I were at the Mall finishing up some last minute shopping. I was starting to yawn—malls have that effect on

me—so I decided I'd go to MacDonald's to see if they still were serving free coffee. **Nope!** So I ordered one. This woman who served me gave me the **senior's discount—and I DIDN'T EVEN ASK FOR IT.** I wanted to bite her fingers off and spit them on the floor! Instead, I meekly accepted my cup of 81 cent coffee and drank it.

-It got worse. Lori and I went to a card shop to find a card for a friend—unsuccessfully. So we walked out—and I was amazed. There was **another** card shop—very close to this one. I said, "Let's check this one." Lori said, "It's the second door to the **same store**, you idiot!" Don't laugh—**age stalks every last person on this planet—including YOU**—as young as you **think** you look!

-I thought it might be a good thing for our souls, on Christmas Eve, to just have a thoroughly honest moment here. I mean, honesty is good, right? So, tell the person next to you how tall you really are, how much you really weigh, and how much debt you're really in! No, better not—I'd like to actually **live** to see Christmas morning.

- b. Apparently, this is quite characteristic of our world. In her book, ***The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement***, Jean Twenge says that according to the latest studies—not only we are being somewhat dishonest in presenting ourselves, we are becoming a generation of narcissists. In other words, we are beginning to believe our own press—that we really **are** the center of the world. We've been raised in the age of self-esteem—which means we don't just believe we have worth; we believe that we were meant to **stand out as special**—more special than others, anyway. We've been told, "The customer is **always** right!" and thought, "You know—that's **true! I AM always right!**"

-We've been told that we're gods. We've been told that the universe is there to **serve us**—give us everything we want! We've been told that we **deserve** what we have—better, even. And we've believed it. We've been told that we can accomplish anything we set our minds to. **Yes we can! Yes we can!** We believe that our opinions are not just right—but **brilliant**. And we are some of the most unhappy, difficult, self-obsessed people to live with or get along with.

How do you **live** with someone who's hoping you will love them as much as **they** do? How can you be satisfied with life when others don't realize how special you really are? How can you wait in line—or in traffic—when others just don't understand how important your time really is?

-We bristle at the thought of being...ordinary. Normal. As people with flaws and limitations. At having our small, defective side revealed. We struggle to get out the words, ***I could be wrong!***

- c. The most amazing thing is that in Jesus—the **Word became FLESH**—when being made of aging, vulnerable, flesh is the thing we can't stand about ourselves. It's quite strange, actually--God—unlimited in **every** sense of that word—is **humble!** Strangely enough, Jesus, the Messiah—didn't have a

**Messiah complex!** He **chose** limits—became helpless and small and vulnerable—to become one of us. Meanwhile we struggle to be...well...**Him!** He steps out of Heaven, takes on flesh and blood; we struggle to admit that we **are** flesh and blood.

-Jesus name means **Savior**. He came to save us from our sin. From ourselves, really; from our ego—from the narcissistic path we're on that makes us think, "I don't need you, thank you very much! I can do this on my own! I'm not a charity case!"

5. Mohammed Ali **[picture]** was known for his ego.

**I am the greatest!** He boarded an airplane once—headed for a special event. When the flight attendant insisted he buckle his seat belt, he said, "Superman don't need no seatbelt!" She said, "Superman don't need no airplane—now buckle up!" He did.

-From what I've seen in my comparatively short life, the ego thing—the need to be bigger than life, special, important, and significant never ends well. It's interesting, isn't it, to watch importance march across the stage of the world in any given year—and see how long it lasts. Last Christmas, Barak Obama was fresh from a phenomenal election and living in blush of success, the economy and corporate bail-outs dominated the news, Michael Jackson was in hiding, and Tiger Woods was at the top of his game. This year, the scenario is **way** different.

-See, that's the way it works. Even if we can convince people that we're special—charming, intelligent and powerful—it doesn't last very long. The household names in Jesus day—as in our day--all had their moment and then disappeared.

- a. Jesus worked with a group of people who, like us, struggled to keep their egos under control. Jesus got so frustrated that one day he held up a little child in front of those he was teaching and said,

**"I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:3-4 NLT)**

- b. You may be thinking, "Ken—I'm totally on the other end of the spectrum you've been talking about. I can't even **pretend** I'm big and important. My life has been squished down into this tiny space. I feel small and weak and broken and hidden. In fact, I'd like to just disappear. I've never felt so powerless to change or make a difference or handle my problems."

-Well, Jesus took the steps He took to voluntarily be where you are right now. In fact, He identifies **most** profoundly—always has, always will-- with people who find themselves on the margins of life. In the most famous message ever given, He called those who have nothing to offer—**blessed; fortunate; lucky**. He said, "**God is on your side!**"

-Paul, one of the stellar leaders of the Early Church, begged for God's help in an area of his that tormented him with weakness. Jesus' astounding response was,

**“My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.”**  
**(2 Corinthians 12:9 NLT)**

God seems to do His best work in the smallness, ordinariness and hassles of everyday life. This Christmas you need to know, whatever form of brokenness you feel, **God is on your side**. And He's **always** at work!

- c. The story of Christmas is about an all-powerful Creator becoming flesh and blood—and demonstrating something He's hoping we'll learn. It's called **downward mobility**—and it's the most **brilliant** move you can make as a human being. Think of it as appropriate smallness. As giving up the need to be important, capable, young, agile, cool, or stand-out-from-the crowd special.

-Truth is, when we **try** to be great—it always comes at the expense of others. And it defies the one quality God loves more than any other—humility. God's blessing is **only** for those who will humble themselves before Him—and before others. Jesus' Name means **Savior**. He came to save people—mostly from themselves; from their own self importance. But He can only save—rescue—change—heal—give life to those who will humble themselves and ask for His help. Have you ever done that?

6. It's interesting; Jesus entered this world small, naked, and helpless. He was wrapped in clothes and laid in a stone manger. He walked on our roads—loved, healed, taught—and pretty much left the way he came; pinned helpless and naked to a cross; then wrapped, once again, in cloths and laid on a slab of stone. With one important difference. He didn't stay there—He was raised in glory. And **that's** why we're here—celebrating His birthday tonight.