These are the Bible verses that John Wesley, the famous Methodist Evangelist, preached to Oxford University, that got him into trouble and forged the First Great Awakening. Opposition from Pharisees broke out; revival broke out; the first Great Awakening that was to propel America at its beginning broke out. These verses are THE SOURCE of all those things. Let us hope it at least keeps us awake during the sermon today...And I preach them on Ordination and Installation Sunday because these Bible verses are a very good place to begin our service to the Lord through the church...

Just before these verses the Apostle Paul notes that “We preach Christ crucified” (I Corinthians 1: 23); we preach a Gospel that has the very Son of God crucified in weakness that God might raise Him to His right hand in power. Christ appeared to be weak on the cross; but He was to rise in God’s power in three days. The Apostle goes on to note: “The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” (v. 25) May I always preach Christ crucified; may I always preach the Gospel; may I always preach that God chooses to pour HIS POWER through our weakness, rather than through our strength. Not many of us are wise according to worldly standards, nor powerful in the way the world understands power, nor of noble birth. We are all just very regular people afterall. I know I certainly am. I’m basically a very shy person (and people laugh when I say that) and then say you couldn’t be shy because you stand up and preach before a lot of people every Sunday. That’s not me; that’s what the Lord does through me. He’s the SOURCE of that; it doesn’t come from me.

Then the Apostle asks us to “consider our call”, as he says. Pastors are called, elders are called by God, deacons are called by the Lord Jesus Christ to serve. This is not your own doing and this is not your own choice; this is God reaching out to you, and God calling you, and God calling you for mysterious purposes for which you do not entirely understand in the moment. He has a divine Sovereign plan and that plan includes you. He reaches out to us purely in mercy to call us. Its not because we’re talented and have all the skills we need. Its not because we’ve been a particularly good person. It’s not because somehow we’ve earned the right to be an elder or a deacon; somehow we’re highly qualified to serve. Its by God’s mercy we are chosen. Its by God’s grace we are called. As the Apostle writes: “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world...so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.” (I Corinthians 1: 27-29) So when God calls us He calls us as un-wise, weak and needy, low and despised. It is no particular worldly honor to serve the crucified Christ. Imagine how those toffy-nosed English Oxford dons would have heard this! Imagine how Bishops and powerful people when they heard this Word would have reacted! He, the Lord Jesus Christ, doesn’t need your diplomas. He doesn’t need your power, your money, your influence. He doesn’t care that the world highly regards you, indeed, this may make you un-teachable and unreachable with the very Gospel you are to preach. I should take every diploma from my wall and every plaque attesting to my accomplishments from their place and burn them as an offering. They are but filthy rags to Jesus. He wants me, warts and all; not some toffy-nosed English overly educated prig. It means nothing that I have more than 35 years of experience in ministry; it means nothing that I have gifts and a track record. All of these I gladly sacrifice to Jesus just for the privilege of naming His name, and preaching the Gospel, and preaching the crucified Christ. HIM!

Consider the butterfly. It does not curse the fact that once it was an egg, or then a larva, or then a pupa. It was a worm, a nothing. Were we to see it at this stage we would find it abhorrent. But then it blooms into a beautiful butterfly; it has wings and takes flight and soars. It is a thing of great beauty. Consider
that this is our life of faith we bring to the Lord. We are not strong, nor wise. There are things in all our pasts for which we are ashamed and think exclude us from service. There are the many, many times we have gotten things wrong over the course of our lives. There are times we have fallen and can’t get up on our own. There are things we have said we wish we could retract. There are things we have done for which we wish there was a do-over. If we are honest to ourselves and also to the Lord, there are many things in our past which we might think keeps us from being an elder or a deacon. But the butterfly does not despise the fact that once it was an egg. Nor does it regret that once it was just a larva, waiting to be born. It does not dwell negatively on the fact that before it was a butterfly it was a pupa, ugly, having no form or comeliness, incapable of flight, not inspiring awe nor beauty. Why do we? Why are we so self-critical? Why do we beat ourselves up with our past? Why does our past keep us from living our faith in the present? Why do we so dwell on the past that we rob ourselves of our future abundant life serving Christ? No! Every one of the stages of our past prepares us for future service to the Lord.

If I have struggled in the past, then perhaps I can help someone else who is struggling in their present. If I feel I have been less than a saint in my past, then perhaps I can encourage someone else that it is the grace of Jesus who has made me who I am today. If I have suffered, perhaps I can alleviate someone else’s suffering. If I have grieved, perhaps it has tenderized my heart and I can give words of encouragement to someone else who has lost a loved one. All the things that we think have made us weak or unacceptable, or unwise, or foolish, or far away from God, actually God can take and through His mercy and His grace turn into a beautiful butterfly of humble, grateful service to Him and to His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. He takes every part of us and uses it to preach the Gospel, to point not to an unafflicted Christ, but to a crucified Christ. The GOOD NEWS of the GOSPEL is that God takes us, warts and all, and chooses to pour His mercy through us –the weakness of God is stronger than the strength of men. He uses every part of us for His glory. God chooses to pour His power through our weakness!

And when we come to HIM in this humility, I am not wise, I am not strong, I am not capable, I am not good apart from You Lord, I don’t have it all figured out, I am incapable of getting to heaven on my own, I don’t have a clue how to be a good Pastor, elder or deacon, when we bring that humble, teachable, broken and open heart to Him it is then HE BECOMES THE SOURCE OF OUR LIFE. The Apostle writes and OH it is true –“HE IS THE SOURCE OF YOUR LIFE!!!!” (I Corinthians 1: 30) Focus on HIM and you will come alive! Place your whole heart and everything you are, the good, the bad and the ugly, place it all as an offering to Him and HE, Jesus, becomes the source of our life. He becomes the source of our WISDOM (He knows, I do not know). He becomes the source of our righteousness (HE is righteous; we are not righteous). He is our sanctification (He is HOLY, we are not HOLY apart from Him). He is our redemption (He is the reason we are redeemed and get to go to heaven- nothing we have ever done has us deserve to go there). The Apostle writes: “(Jesus) is the SOURCE...whom God has made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” (v. 30)

I’m glad for my grief and I’m glad for my struggles. I’m glad for my mistakes and I’m glad for my failings and I’m glad for my past. Because it makes me just humble enough to have Jesus be the SOURCE of my life and the SOURCE of my ministry and the SOURCE of every good thing. He is the source of the Good News of the Gospel—that HE chooses imperfect, flawed people—foolish, weak, those whom the world might consider low and despised—in order to proclaim a crucified Christ, to a broken, hurting world that can only be restored when it understands that indeed HE JESUS IS THE SOURCE...Elders, deacons, when you approach Him thusly, He will pour His power through our weakness, in Jesus’ name! Amen & Amen!

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IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!