

NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

STEVEN FURTICK



(UN)QUALIFIED

HOW GOD USES BROKEN PEOPLE
TO DO BIG THINGS



Praise for
(Un)Qualified

“*(Un)Qualified* will take you from self-doubt and insecurity to a renewed trust in the God who called and equipped you for his will and purpose.”

—JOYCE MEYER, Bible teacher and *New York Times*
best-selling author

“God doesn’t call the qualified. He qualifies the called. This book will challenge you and encourage you into a life characterized by prayerful dependence and decisiveness—your life will never be the same.”

—MARK BATTERSON, lead pastor of National Community
Church, Washington, DC, and *New York Times*
best-selling author of *The Circle Maker*

“Not only does Pastor Steven give voice to the hurt we so often stuff down deep when someone makes us feel as if we’re not good enough, but he also points us back to the only One who can truly measure our potential. *(Un)Qualified* will strategically and biblically show you that even when we’re overlooked by people, we are handpicked by God to play a part in his magnificent plan. This is such a needed message for today!”

—LYSA TERKEURST, president of Proverbs 31 Ministries
and *New York Times* best-selling author

“Too often we embrace the fallacy that our successes hang solely on our qualifications. That we—and we alone—are the architects of our accomplishments and the framers of our future. I’ve been in ministry long enough to realize that God delights in using the

most unlikely candidates to accomplish his purposes and that our abilities are always secondary to his calling. In *(Un)Qualified* Pastor Steven Furtick shows how we can partner and participate with God's calling for our lives, no matter who we are, where we are, or what we think we are lacking."

—BISHOP T. D. JAKES, founder and senior pastor of
The Potter's House, Dallas, and *New York Times*
best-selling author

"Almost everyone I know battles feelings of insecurity, unworthiness, and self-doubt. I know I do. That's why Pastor Steven Furtick's life-changing book *(Un)Qualified* is a must-read. This power-packed book will build your faith, stir your dreams, and help you see yourself as God sees you. If you have ever battled with feeling unqualified, unprepared, or unsure of yourself, pick up this transformative book and be inspired, because our God uses broken people to do big things."

—CRAIG GROESCHEL, senior pastor of Life.Church and author
of *#Struggles: Following Jesus in a Selfie-Centered World*

"My friend Steven Furtick is one of the most authentic, passionate people I have ever met. His love for God and for people is nothing short of inspiring. Pastor Steven's book *(Un)Qualified* is a must-read for every Jesus follower. In it he reveals how our tendency to fixate on our failures and major in our mistakes ultimately short-circuits our calling. But even more than that, he points us to a personal relationship with Jesus, the One who calls us, equips us, and carries us into our destiny."

—JUDAH SMITH, lead pastor of The City Church, Seattle, and
New York Times best-selling author of *Jesus Is _____*

“All humans strive to be stronger than we really are, better than we really are, and more than we really are. That’s not bad . . . it just won’t work. And as Steven shows, it leads us even further away from who we truly are and who we want to become. This book will help you get more comfortable in your own skin, stop the striving, and see the truth of how God’s power flows when we can be real.”

—DR. HENRY CLOUD, clinical psychologist, acclaimed leadership expert, and best-selling author

“In a world distracted and enamored by external qualifications, Pastor Steven’s book is a refreshing reminder that God looks at the heart. When we respond to him in humility and faith, his power turns even our weaknesses into strengths. I am so excited about what God will do in your life as you read and experience the principles in this book! It will change the way you see yourself, talk about yourself, and even pray about yourself.”

—CHRISTINE CAINE, evangelist, author, and founder of The A21 Campaign

“In *(Un)Qualified* my friend Steven Furtick reminds us that God’s qualification system is very different from ours. If you’re anything like me, that’s a welcome reminder and a big relief! In these inspiring pages Steven speaks bold, helpful truth in a humble and honest way. He encourages us to lose the labels we’ve placed on ourselves and live instead in the revelation of a God who can even turn our weaknesses into strengths. This brilliant book really resonated with me, and I know it will with you too.”

—MATT REDMAN, worship leader and Grammy-winning songwriter

“To watch the ministry of Pastor Steven Furtick is to watch someone living in his grace zone. He is a remarkable communicator, a passionate church builder, and a lover of truth. I have no doubts that his latest offering, *(Un)Qualified*, will resonate with each and every person who has ever felt the pull of calling and the inadequacy of their own humanity. This book will encourage and strengthen you as you walk the journey.”

—BRIAN HOUSTON, founder and global senior pastor
of Hillsong Church and author of the international
best-selling *Live, Love, Lead*

“In a culture obsessed with perception and perfection, *(Un)Qualified* is a refreshing reminder that God uses even our weaknesses to our advantage. Steven Furtick’s latest book is honest, practical, and thoroughly encouraging, and I highly recommend it. It will help you see yourself with more faith and courage than ever before.”

—ANDY STANLEY, senior pastor, North Point
Ministries, Atlanta

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*I dedicate this book to Max.
You are the better man.*

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**There is a crack in everything.
That's how the light gets in.**

Leonard Cohen



Unqualified

“What comes to your mind when you hear the name Steven Furtick?” the interviewer asked the renowned theologian.

Hey, they’re talking about me!

I sprinted back into the room where the video was playing, secretly excited to be the center of attention. I had read this guy’s book about ministry in seminary, so I was rather flattered he knew my name. We had never even met.

I had found this particular interview the way you discover most YouTube videos—by free-falling into the abyss that is the “recommended for you” sidebar. After I’d clicked it, I’d walked away to get dressed for church. I could still hear the interview in the background, but I wasn’t really listening.

Until, out of nowhere, I heard that sweetest sound of all: my own name. It’s always great to be recognized.

Except when it’s not.

“What comes to your mind when you hear the name Steven Furtick?”

The theologian sighed and dropped his head, signifying that

the mere consideration of my name was wearisome. That got the crowd chuckling. Apparently they knew he wasn't a fan.

Long, pained pause. Agonized grimace. Bone-chilling stare.

Then the verdict.

“Unqualified.”

He delivered the four syllables with a disgust that underscored the gravity and finality of his pronouncement. Only the gavel sound effect was missing.

No elaboration. No explanation. No qualifiers. My whole life and ministry summed up with a single word.

And abruptly the interview moved on.

Unqualified?

That word started the wheels spinning in my head. It was strange because part of me wanted to come to my defense (against YouTube?), but the other part was thinking, *Friend, you don't know the half of it.*

Yes, I struggle—with my temper, with my focus, with my motives, with my eating habits, with my prayer life, with my state of mind. And that list doesn't even scratch the surface.

I know my weaknesses and faults better than anyone. I don't need to listen to an online interview to feel disqualified. Hardly a day goes by that I'm not seized by the sensation that I have no business doing what I'm doing. That I'm in over my head. That I don't deserve any of my blessings or opportunities.

Am I unqualified?

This book is the answer to that question. I'm not writing it in reaction to that random interview on YouTube. I've been asking myself that question my whole life. And maybe you have too.

When I started the journey that lies behind this book, I wanted to finally figure out how to respond to that question within myself. I wanted to know if that theologian was correct. If the whispers of doubt that regularly rattle through my head are inner demons to be ignored—or warning bells to be heeded. If I should shoulder my responsibilities with confidence in my calling—or panic and hide before I mess everything up.

At one point or another, you've probably felt unqualified. Maybe you didn't have the dubious privilege of being informed of the fact via YouTube, but you knew it was true nonetheless.

I think we all secretly fight feelings of inadequacy, insufficiency, and incompetence. We wonder whether we really measure up. We fear we are not “enough”—whatever that means in our particular situations.

Maybe it's in your character. There is a flaw, a crack, a deficiency that you try your hardest to hide. It could be lust. It could be anger. It could be addiction. Even if it's in the past, you may live in secret fear that one day it will come back in fury and destroy everything you are building.

Maybe it's in your role as a parent. At the workplace you have everything under control. You can buy and sell and trade with the best of them. But your home life is another story. You have no idea how to raise your teenager, and you are feeling dangerously unprepared.

Or maybe you know something deep in your soul is propelling you into ministry. Not necessarily full-time but definitely something significant. You are supposed to be a leader, a decision maker, a risktaker. But your track record is far from spotless. And

the thought of putting yourself out there is petrifying. What if you fail? And what if your failures shipwreck others along the way?

Many people live their entire lives fighting these contradictions. They deal constantly with voices in their heads telling them that they don't qualify, that they will never qualify, that they are totally, epically *disqualified*.

I wrote a book called *Crash the Chatterbox* about how to sort through negative thoughts. But this book isn't about just changing what rattles around in our minds or what comes out of our mouths. It's about understanding who we really are *now* in order to be who we are capable of *becoming*. It's about ruthlessly peeling back the prejudices and assumptions we've made about ourselves. It's about letting God be our source of sufficiency.

I have good news. If you look at the great men and women of Scripture, you find one common denominator: they were *all* unqualified. God has a habit of picking people who have been passed over.

PASS OR FAIL

Have you ever thought about who—or what—truly has the ability to qualify you? Who has the ultimate right to determine if you are a success or a failure?

It's not as simple as it sounds.

For example, think about the first qualification system most of us experience in life: grades. Schools invest huge amounts of money and manpower into developing standards and tests. They

attempt to summarize students' academic progress with a universal system of numbers or letters.

Maybe you've been out of school for a while, but do you remember when your universe revolved around grades? Or maybe it didn't but your parents thought it should, in which case report-card day was probably terrifying. It was basically a preview of Judgment Day minus the cherubs and big white throne.

How did you feel when you got a passing grade? Probably relieved. Your parents were happy. Life was good again.

But think about it. Did that grade mean you learned the material? Or just that you were good at taking tests—or maybe cheating on them? Even more important, did your grade mean you actually knew how to apply what you had learned?

Or maybe you got a failing grade. Did that mean you would fail in life? Did the fact that you dated the American Revolution before Columbus or forgot the quadratic equation or thought the periodic table had something to do with punctuation really doom you to an inferior existence?

Most of us have been around long enough to know that that little letter or number is important, but it's not the final word. Not even close. History is filled with successful academic dropouts, from Abraham Lincoln to Walt Disney to Bill Gates.

This whole business of judging and assessing and qualifying one another doesn't stop with school. It is deeply ingrained in our culture and psyche. Just look at our clichés.

Pass the test.

Make the cut.

Fall short.

Measure up.

Make the grade.

Earn your stripes.

Pay your dues.

We constantly analyze and summarize each other. We compare people to our standards—spoken or unspoken—to see how they measure up. Then we accept them or reject them; we praise them or criticize them; we revere them or ridicule them. We all secretly administer exams in the university of our own opinions.

But just like grades in school, our evaluations don't usually tell the whole story. They are artificial, limited attempts to quantify something that can't really be reduced to a number, a letter, or a word.

But we keep trying. Because we're human, and that's what we do.

Basically, we tend to qualify people based on *character* and *competency*.

Character refers to who we are. Not just our names or nationalities, but our personalities, our morals, our values, our emotional makeup, our likes and dislikes, our tastes, our manners—the list goes on.

Competency refers to what we do. It's the complex sum of our training, achievements, talents, activities, and potential. It's about how good we are at what we do and about how much we accomplish.

Our competency is usually much more at the forefront than our character. What we *do* makes headlines. It fills the pages of

our résumés. It is so intricately connected to our identity that we often think it *is* our identity.

Sooner or later, though, our character gets the last laugh. People might hire us and use us for what we do, but they accept us and like us for who we are. And ultimately, of course, who we are determines what we do. You can pretend for only so long before the real you comes out.

The moment we meet a new person, we size up that person. We don't do this consciously for the most part. And it isn't necessarily meanspirited. We automatically gather clues about the other person's character and competency. We start to categorize the person in relationship to us.

Will we be friends? Am I interested in knowing this individual better, or should we just be casual acquaintances? Will he advance my career? Does she need my help? Is he a threat to me? Does she have something to offer me, or do I have something to offer her?

It would be easy to lament how selfish all this sounds and to make the case that our standards for others are so subjective and hypocritical they are laughable.

But I don't think that would really do humankind justice. Of course there are elements of subjectivity and self-centeredness in our relationships with others. That is part of life in a broken, fallen world. It is an instinct for self-preservation.

It's not realistic to expect people to accept each other at face value. Nor is it healthy to be naive and assume that everyone is our best friend or has our best interest at heart. That's why Jesus told us to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

But here's a point worth noting. We tend to be exceptionally

poor judges of other people. Have you noticed? And frankly we aren't even that good at judging ourselves.

That lack of accuracy, more than our tendency to assess others in the first place, is the problem.

I think that's what seemed kind of outrageous about the comments from my YouTube critic. Where did this guy get his information? His standards? His authority?

I'm not trying to judge his judgmentalism. That would be ironic. But I do have to decide how to react to it. And I don't mean my public response.

I'm talking about something far more important: my internal response. How do I view myself? How do I react to the criticism and assessments of a world obsessed with qualifications? How do I silence my own doubts, insecurities, and fears of failure?

The answer isn't what you would think. Or at least it wasn't what I thought when I started this journey.

THE QUALIFICATION TRAP

I used to think that the answer to my failures was to fix them, that the solution to my weaknesses was to replace them with strengths. I assumed the secret to success was to appear as perfect, flawless, and superhuman as possible. I concluded that my character and my competency qualified me or disqualified me.

But God's qualification system is much different from ours. And so is his way of approaching our weaknesses. Rather than stressing and obsessing over our lack, we need to find a different qualifier.

In the next few chapters, we are going to explore what it means to be qualified God's way. I believe it will revolutionize the way you see yourself and others. That's what it has done for me.

As you understand how God sees you, you will find the freedom and self-confidence that he wants for your life.

You will never get those things from human qualifications, by the way. That's a dead-end street. You could never be perfect enough or failproof enough to be at peace with yourself on that basis alone.

Peace and confidence come through one thing: acceptance. In a culture fixated on self-improvement and self-help, that might seem counterintuitive. But it's true.

First, *God's unconditional acceptance of you*. God knows your true identity—the real you—and he loves you just as you are.

Second, *your acceptance of yourself, including your weaknesses*. That means confronting the parts of you that you may prefer to ignore. And it means knowing who you are (and who you are not) in and through Jesus.

And third, *your acceptance of God's process of change*. God's work in your life isn't meant to squelch or eradicate the real you but rather to bring out the best possible version of you.

Those three concepts—identity, weakness, and change—will show up again and again in this book because they are directly related to this issue of being qualified.

The three have a cyclical relationship. I know the “real me”—my identity—all too well. I know I have many weaknesses. That makes me feel unqualified, so I try to change my weaknesses. But reality soon sinks in. I can't completely fix myself. So my identity suffers even more, and I feel even less qualified.

As long as my answer to my lack of qualifications is just to try harder to qualify myself, I'll stay stuck in that cycle.

Has that ever happened to you? Do your failures ever shout so loudly you can't hear the opportunities? Do your self-doubts ever sabotage your success before you even get out of the gate?

The gap between who you are and what you want to accomplish can feel impossibly wide, and the question is left looming: *Am I qualified for this?*

Now let me say this up-front—that question is not the problem. You *should* ask yourself if you are qualified. Especially if you are trying to fly an airplane or perform open-heart surgery. In those cases, by all means, evaluate your training, your knowledge, your experience, and your abilities. We will all thank you for it. And certainly there are ethical and moral standards to uphold not only in ministry but in any field.

But when it comes to more subjective matters, keep in mind that your assessment is not infallible. And maybe, just maybe, you are overestimating your shortcomings and underestimating your gifts. Maybe the fact that you don't currently measure up to the expectations you or other people have isn't a deal killer. Maybe God wants to do something beyond your abilities, and he is far less intimidated by your failures and limits than you are.

The more I study these subjects in the Bible, the more convinced I am that we need a fuller understanding of ourselves and of God. And we need to give less weight to our opinion of our weaknesses and problems.

The feeling of being unqualified produces all kinds of bizarre behavior. We pretend to have everything together when really it's

falling apart. Or we think everything is falling apart just when it's on the verge of coming together. We live under a constant cloud of comparison. We manipulate and scheme because we think trickery is the only way to get what we want.

Insecurity, comparison, manipulation, pretense—they all come from a wrong understanding of what it means to be approved and qualified by God.

But God's solution to our shortcomings is not necessarily to fix them. He has a better idea, as we'll see in the following pages.

PARADOXICAL PATRIARCH

One of the most dramatically unqualified biblical heroes I can think of is Jacob. Awhile back I was studying the life of this man in preparation for a sermon series. Out of nowhere a thought rattled me.

God can't bless who you pretend to be.

Prior to that thought I was wondering why in the world I had chosen to preach about this paradoxical patriarch for the next five weeks. He was turning out to be the most complicated biblical antihero I'd ever studied. Most of the stories involving Jacob are like episodes of *The Sopranos*—you don't know whom to root for because everyone is messed up. Like the time Jacob's uncle tricked him into getting drunk and accidentally sleeping with the wrong woman on his wedding night.

Jacob was a liar, a con, a trickster, a fraud. He spent much of his life haunted by bad decisions and exiled to the chaos of self-inflicted consequences. If anyone deserved to be called unqualified,

it was this guy. He was not exactly the character that neat sermon outlines and Sunday school lessons are made of.

And yet God called him. Chose him. Even blessed him. And Jacob ended up playing a major role in God's plan to redeem the world. He emerges as simultaneously one of the most important figures in Scripture and one of the most screwed up.

That Thursday afternoon with my Bible open and my notes out, I was blindsided by the realization that I am just like Jacob in so many ways. Not nearly as important in the scheme of human history, of course. But every bit as unqualified from a human perspective. And every bit as valuable and loved in God's eyes.

Just like Jacob I often find myself pretending to be someone I'm not because I'm embarrassed about who I am. I think my weaknesses are the problem and faking it till I make it is the solution.

But God can't bless someone I'm not. He longs to bless me. The real *me*, with all my ups and downs and pros and cons.

The more I analyzed the story of Jacob, the more I saw God as the Qualifier. Jacob was a poster child for the confusion and complications that weaknesses produce. But he was also a dramatic example of someone who was, at least by the end of his life, able to embrace his insufficiencies, look past them, and trust in God.

And when he did, God took over. He overruled Jacob's limitations and trumped his disqualifications.

Jacob was acutely, painfully, spectacularly human. That's probably why his life speaks so clearly to me. I can relate to his failures faster than his feats, and I bet you can too.

What I learned through studying Jacob radically shifted my

thinking. In the last few chapters of this book, I'll address Jacob's life in more detail. His story gives us a fascinating case study in God's power at work in our weaknesses.

Ultimately God redeemed, redefined, and realigned Jacob not in spite of but through his weaknesses. And that's what he will do for you and me.



On the day the theologian informed me of my utter unqualifiedness, God reminded me of a verse that talks about our qualifications: “It is not that we think we are qualified to do anything on our own. Our qualification comes from God. He has enabled us to be ministers of his new covenant” (2 Corinthians 3:5–6, NLT).

All of a sudden I felt liberated.

Yes, *unqualified* suits me just fine. It has a nice ring to it. And it puts me in some pretty good company, starting with Jacob.

So go ahead and put it on my business card. And in my Twitter bio too.

God called me. *God* equipped me. *God* empowered me. *God* opened doors for me. So my qualifications, or lack thereof, were relatively irrelevant.

Yes, I had some ground to stand on if I wanted to defend my ministerial pedigree. But why? It's the truth: God has blessed my efforts far beyond what I could ever deserve. And that's amazing! Really, why would I want to limit my influence and success merely to what I qualify for?

“Unqualified” wasn't a criticism. It was a compliment. Granted,

an unintended, backhanded compliment, but a compliment nonetheless. It was a public reminder that God has done so much more than I deserve in and through me.

I hope that doesn't sound proud, because it's not. I think it's actually the opposite of pride. Humility—true humility—isn't putting yourself down. It's recognizing that you owe everything to God. It's stepping into your destiny based not on who you are or what you can do but on who God is and what he will do through you.

I'm sure that theologian loves God and the church. When we both get to heaven someday, perhaps I'll invite him over to my place for some boiled peanuts, and maybe we'll laugh about the whole thing.

But right now what matters most isn't what comes to another person's mind when he hears my name. What matters most is what comes to *God's* mind and *my* mind.

I ended up watching that little part of the interview five more times. I was laughing out loud by the last time. I texted the link to a few friends. I briefly considered how funny it would be to make it into a meme for Instagram.

Then I finished getting ready for church. Before the service I prayed with my team as I do almost every weekend. As we were closing the prayer, I added an unusual line. My team probably wondered what in the world I was talking about, but it made me smile, and it filled me with a strange confidence and gratitude.

“And thank you, Lord, . . . that we are unqualified.”



THE THIRD WORD

“I am Steven.”

I’ve said it thousands of times. I’ve spelled it almost as many, because if you don’t alert people to the *v* they’ll stick a *ph* in the middle every time.

And don’t get me started on *Furtick*.

What is the key word in the phrase *I am Steven*? It’s the name, right? *Steven*. That’s what identifies me. The first two words—*I am*—are just there to set up the statement. They are filler. Just insignificant monosyllabic fluff.

Or are they?

Hold that thought.