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# How Judith Guest's Book Ordinary People Brings Out The Theme Of Weakness

## Weakness in Ordinary People

The weak always dwell in the past, and do not attempt to solve their troubles by moving forward in life. In *Ordinary People* by Judith Guest, the characters find difficulty in breaking out of their problems, and always stubbornly stay in their problems. The Jarretts, the main characters in *Ordinary People*, appear to be anything but weak, but when closely examined, weakness can be seen flowing through their veins.

By succumbing to their emotions and desires easily, the members of the Jarrett family reveal their inner weakness beneath a thin layer of strength. Arnold Bacon, a mentor of Calvin, does not approve of “law students who married while they were in school” (Page 49); however, Calvin—at that time a young law student—does so anyways when he meets Beth. Losing a chance for a better legal career, Calvin falls for Beth, showing a lack of mental control. By falling for his desires, Calvin shows lack of mental control, a crucial factor in determining strength, allows Calvin’s weakness to be shown. Beth, who fires a “goddamn maid because she couldn’t dust the living room right” (Page 119), also has a weakness in emotional control. Having a very narrow mindset, wanting everything to be following her standards, Beth becomes frustrated when there is even a slightest flaw in her life. Frustration—a primary emotion of Beth—gains control over her thoughts, and allows her mental barriers to break down. Beth’s weak mind permits those emotions to control her. Beth and Calvin display weakness when they allow their emotions and desires control them.

By not being able to recover completely from Jordan’s death, the Jarretts once again show weakness. Calvin knows that “the loss of Jordan, his elder, his light-hearted son” (Page 34) cannot be changed; however, he still grieves. Though the loss of a son may be a significant one, recovering from it is not as difficult as the Jarretts’ recovery. Many fathers have lost sons, and many of them did not allow their losses take over their lives. Calvin’s weakness, which plays a decisive role in deciding the outcome of his recovery, allows the loss of Jordan to consume his life, decreasing his productivity at work and his ability to interact with others. Even though Conrad thinks the death of Jordan “doesn’t change anything” (Page 44), he allows that death to hijack his daily activities and his thoughts. Conrad’s weakness causes his depression, as his inability to shake off Jordan’s death lets his emotions to be taken over by that loss. By not getting over the loss of Jordan quickly enough to prevent a disruption in his daily life, Conrad shows that his weak mind simply cannot cope with a loss of that degree. Jordan’s death completely hampers the Jarretts to live normal life, because the Jarretts’ weak minds do not allow them to recover completely.

When Beth decides to leave Calvin, she is showing a lack of self-determination, another factor of weakness. When Calvin does not “understand any more” (Page 253) of Beth’s behavior, he is seeing absolutely no reason in Beth’s decision. Beth’s selfish desire to leave her family, breaking a motherly bond with Conrad, shows that she is weak. Her inability to stay behind for the sake of Conrad developing a healthy young adult life, a product of weakness, reveals that she cannot control her desires and emotions. Beth’s decision to leave is entirely out of her own

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selfish desires, the desire that her weak mind cannot control.

The Jarretts of Ordinary People display many instances of weakness, the weakness that causes most of their problems. The Jarretts dwell in the past, which prevents them from moving forward with their lives. The weak will always grieve about the past, and will never have the willpower to move on.

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