

We're going to be in Ephesians chapter 2 today, so go ahead and start heading there if you have your Bibles with you. While you're flipping there, I want to give you some more information about me, so that you can understand me and so that we can leave here being best friends.

I was saved from my sin in my early 20s. The Lord worked through my peers to soften my heart and bring me to a place of repentance. Shortly after being saved, I felt a call to ministry. I started pursuing it through undergraduate studies at a private college, and it rapidly became financially unrealistic (private school loans, am I right?). My parents were helping me, but I couldn't justify the size of the loans I would be coming out with. I had gone away to "big kid school" for a year, and actually had the opportunity to take a class taught by none other than our own Lee Eclov, who we had the chance to hear speak last week. We hung out three or four times over the past year before we even realized we had crossed paths before. Do with that information what you will!

After deciding not to pursue my ministry *degree*, I spent some time feeling lost. I wasn't sure of my purpose. I thought I knew; I still felt called to ministry, but the path I was expecting to take suddenly seemed unrealistic. I came back home, continued school at Rock Valley to defer those pesky school loans that had already started to creep up on me, and after some time Naomi and I, who had been friends for years, started dating. A couple years later, we were married.

We've now been married 9 years and 2 months, as of tomorrow, and were blessed to be married by our very own Pastor Dave Spooner.

I have since received my undergraduate degree in contemporary fine art. "Bachelor of Fine Arts in Design and Media Arts." In my specific case: photography. Throughout five years working laboriously through my art degree, I spent hours poring over the writings of artists who challenged the way we have thought about art. You'll see why this is important to what I want to talk to you about today.

One thing that is constant from the start of recorded histories of visual art is that art is always created to *do* something. From the French salons of old, to the Guggenheim gallery of today, artists craft pieces that are designed to make the viewer laugh, cry, consider, perhaps get angry or frustrated, or perhaps to introspect. To consider our inner selves.

Art - created things - have *purpose*. We craft things for a reason. Whether a painting, a building, a sculpture, or a musical instrument. And this is not a fluke of our being. It's a model that is inherent within us, I believe, as image bearers of a creative Creator. God created not *just* a piece of art, God created the *universe*. Have you all seen the photo that came back from the James Webb telescope recently? Take a look at this.

With the exception of the objects with the pointy flares on them, everything in this image is a *galaxy*. And the amount of space this image covered? Equivalent to taking a piece of sand, holding it at arms length away. The amount of sky that grain of sand covers? That's the amount of space we see here. Our God is truly a God of Wonders, and the whole of creation declares his majesty, amen?

From the innumerable stars and galaxies, to the most infinitesimal molecules and atoms that make up you and me, to the laws of thermodynamics and gravity, God has created all of it.

This brings me to the passage I want us to consider today. It's one of my personal favorite portions of scripture.

See, in writing to the church in Ephesus, the apostle Paul had the boldness to declare us, you and me, as God's masterpieces. How many of you can honestly say you feel like a masterpiece? I certainly can't. Especially not compared to the beauty of all those galaxies. But hey, let's turn to Ephesians chapter 2 in our Bibles and see why Paul says this.

To give some context for what the letter of Ephesians is, I really love how Dr. Te-Li Lau describes what the letter of Ephesians, as a whole, is meant for. Dr. Lau describes the letter to the church in Ephesus as "a manifesto for the church, describing [the church's] essence and identity: who [the church] is, how [the church] came about, how [the church] must conduct itself, and what [the church's] mission is within the larger framework of God's cosmic rule."

At this point in the letter, chapter 2, Paul is telling the Ephesian believers (remember this is a letter to the church in Ephesus) that they were all, including Paul himself, at one point dead in their sin, and thus separated from God. And then comes verse 4.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved - and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not a result of works so that no one may boast.

And now into our passage for today, verse 10:

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Notice the progression here. We are "dead". You know what a dead person can do? NOTHING. They're *dead*.

The work *starts* with God, "*But God*" in verse 4, travels through his Grace through the Christ Messiah, in order to demonstrate His rich grace in kindness. It's to share God's testimony. How is he demonstrating that? By saving us without *any* of our own work "*By GRACE* you have been saved". And this grace which has resulted in us as new creations in Christ has a resulting effect - we are created for a Purpose. He shows the world His richness of grace in kindness through Christ, through us and through the work he has prepared for us.

The word we translate as "workmanship" in the ESV is sometimes translated as handiwork, as His "work of art", or as His *masterpiece*. We are God's masterpiece, as he has made us alive, out of our

death, together with Christ. And as God's masterpiece, here's what I want you to know: you can find assurance in the **Purpose and Path for Work** that is being described here.

Purpose for Work

So how do you know we have purpose Michael? Well, let's look! The Greek word for workmanship here is "poiema", from the root "poiesis" which gives us such words as "doer" as seen in **Romans 2:13** "...the doers of the law...", or in **Acts 17:28** "...as even some of your own poets have said...". So our God is a "doer" who brings poetry (or you can think of craftsmanship) into His 'doing'. Poiema brings with it a connotation of a creator who ascribes purpose and intention to their creation. Can you hear our word, poetry, in it?

As *poiema* of a sovereign God, *we are created in Christ Jesus for good works.*

God has created us, you and me, *in Christ*. He does His incredible work through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This is not something that has to do with our own abilities, we can't weightlift our spirituality into this creation, because we **are** the creation. Just as the painter chooses which colors to use, where the stroke is placed, how quickly it moves, so God has crafted each of us as His masterpiece, in Christ. Instead of a brush stroke, we have a cross. Instead of paints, we have a resurrection.

Instead of death, we have a God who paints with Grace.

I want you to hear that again. Instead of *death*, we have a God who paints with Grace.

Have you ever seen an artist who can create *life* out of *death*?

And as a direct result of this creation status, we have a God-given, God-designed purpose.

James 2:26 says "*faith apart from works is dead*" and the words of Jesus call out to us from Matthew "*every healthy tree bears good fruit.*"

We have been purposed for work. So how do we know WHAT works to do? Before we get there, let's understand that Paul gives us some advice by declaring that *whatever* we do, we have a **path for work**, as well. We have a **purpose** for work, and we have **path** for that work.

Path for work

How many of you have ever seen someone working on a mural, like the ones we have all over downtown? I went to Auburn High School, a long, long, long, long time ago. If you aren't familiar with Auburn, part of their school was the C.A.P.A program, the Creative And Performing Arts program. While I was in school, the art classes painted a massive mural all along our wall in the school commons.

It started with planning it on paper: determining how much space they had to work with, what types of imagery they wanted on the wall and where. They made decisions on things like colors, and then the actual path of painting across the wall.

They had a path, a plan to get the final product.

Before they could paint them in though, they had to chart out the path on the wall itself. They transferred the ideas from paper to the wall in a line art design, devoid of the new vibrant colors they were planning. And only after they did ALL of this, did they finally actually paint in the mural.

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God has created a path for us. He's prepared, *beforehand*, how he wants us to look, what he wants us to do. You and I are *still in progress* - we are continuously being *sanctified*, conforming into the likeness of Christ in the holiness He's provided for us.

I want you to look around the room for a moment. Just look around and see each other. Look at people you've maybe not looked at or seen before. To the front, and then to the back of the room. As you're looking around, I want you to realize that you're looking at people who are crafted by God, who are masterpieces.

We're different than a wall mural, aren't we? A wall mural doesn't get to decide if it follows the path that was laid before it. It doesn't have any *agency*. We, brothers and sisters, are given agency by God. We are given a choice. We can diverge from the path, but I'd like you to consider the way those murals downtown look. And I'd like you to consider if you'd think they'd look as good as they do, if the colors and shapes were free to do *whatever* they like.

We have that option. But Paul finishes this text by saying "*that we should walk in [those good works that God has prepared].*"

Walking within God's path for us isn't always where *we* want to go. But walking within God's path for us is sure to bring together the beautiful masterpiece that you were created to be. Life is messy, and hard. That difficulty can make us rebel against God's path for us, because we think that he's a harmful God, or that He's indifferent. But His path for us is demonstrated time and again to be *better* for us than our own plan. Yes, life is hard. But within God's path for us is a joy that goes beyond any temporary pain.

When Naomi and I were on our honeymoon, we were blessed to be gifted tickets to Florence, Italy. I don't know if you know this yet, but Naomi and I *love* art. When we were in Italy, we visited the monastery of St. Francis of Assisi, we visited the Uffizi gallery, and we also go to visit the Accademia. The Accademia is most well known for its collection of sculptures, and they are many and stunning. But there's a time as you're moving along the path when you walk into a long chamber.

On either side of the chamber are busts and statues, all of which are stunning in their own right. But when you walk into this chamber, it became impossible for me, at least, to look anywhere but the

end of the chamber. See, I had become *arrested* by the beauty in the sculpture that was standing atop a lifted dais. David, sculpted by Michelangelo Buonarroti, absolutely took my breath away.

When we are living in our call to be God's masterpiece, our lives should *arrest* the attention of others. They should know, upon seeing and talking to us, that we're *different*. That we have a different *artist* who has crafted us.

God is a God of the universe. Here's that picture I showed you earlier, again. I want you to look at it. Really look. Start counting the galaxies.

That's our God. That's our painter. Our *planet* isn't even the size of a speck of dust in this photograph, let alone you and I, yet we are told that we are God's masterpiece. And when we look at a piece of art, our response, if we're paying attention, shifts from "wow that's beautiful" to "wow, what mastery created *that*". Art points back to a creator. Michelangelo was a sculptor, a painter, a poet, and engineer, an architect, and a ninja turtle. Yet nothing he made, no matter how arresting his paintings of the Sistine Chapel of Genesis and The Last Judgement, no matter how breathtaking David may be, *nothing he made can compare to being painted and crafted through the grace of a Savior who created the universe.*

I want to recognize again that we are different than inanimate pieces of work. We can reject the gift of grace. We can reject our purpose. But we also have the hard, and sometimes confusing, work of following this path. How do we do that? How do we follow the path God has for our lives?

Psalm 119: *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path"*

Proverbs 16:9 *"The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps"*

Colossians 3:23-24: *Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.*

AW Tozer said "It is not *what* we do that makes a thing sacred, it is *why* we do it."

Whatever you do, work heartily. We get so caught up in our *vocation* or *job* being our "calling" or "purpose" that we forget that our calling is to be the salt and the light to the world on this side of eternity.

How do you figure out the path God has for you? We've been talking about it for months on Sundays, prayer! We don't pray to an absent God, we pray to a God who hears when we call. Like Lee talked about last week, the prayers of the believers *silence heaven*.

Maybe your work looks different than what this society calls work, because the Lord has given you a different set of abilities, or seemingly gave you "fewer" abilities than someone else. That's okay, because you can still pray. Our work is to make disciples. Our work is to be salt and light. Our work is to proclaim the Gospel. Our vocational work, our job, if we have one is simply one place where our spiritual work can come to pass. But the work of the Lord far surpasses what we consider "normal" in our culture.

God makes you into a masterpiece through His grace. Through Jesus. He has given you a purpose and a path for work.

So where is your focus? Are you working as though you're in a personal relationship with the God of the universe, or as if you're trying to climb a corporate ladder? The Lord doesn't leave us to wander aimlessly. We have a purpose to fulfill, which means there is a path to follow that has been laid out for us, prepared for us beforehand. God's providence is mightier than our best laid plans; as Joseph told his brothers after revealing he was still alive *"But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."*

Paul gives us a summary of how our walking in good works should manifest later in the letter:

"...walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Do you notice that none of these things are specific directions for figuring out the what? The "what" of the Church is to *walk in a deeply committed relationship with the Lord*. God wants our hearts, and the result of that connection are the character traits that manifest when we are in lockstep with God.

What work have you been called to? Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. And when you do that, when you have your very *being* focused on God, the natural outflow of that is to love your neighbor as yourself.

How have you been walking lately? Have you been walking in a way worthy of your calling as God's poiema? Have you been gentle and patient? Have you had any discussions lately on gun control, Roe v Wade, or Republican or Democrat policy? Are you able to be gentle and patient with those in the church with whom you disagree about such heated topics? What are you like on the job? At the grocery store behind a crying child? On the road after being cut off or behind someone driving too slow, or when the bus is running behind schedule?

When your kids see you, your neighbors, your spouses, your coworkers, your boss, your employees, strangers in the grocery store or on the road, do they become arrested by the incredible work of Jesus in your life, as the statue of David arrested my attention? Or do they gloss over you, assuming you to be just another person in the world, living for the money, status, or shallow happiness they (probably) assume everyone is living for?

We are God's masterpieces, formed through the atoning work of Christ, created with a **Purpose for Work** and a **Path for Work**. And friends if you are sitting here, lost in this world, unsure of your purpose, or trying to carve out your own paths for yourself that are ultimately unfulfilling, I call you to a better way, to an eternal purpose. I call you to be painted by Grace.