

Criteria for a Christian Minister

by Chuck Smith

The Christian life is about recognizing God's work and responding to it with a willing and joyful heart.

Duration: 1:05:26

Scripture: Ephesians 1:4-7, Ephesians 1:9, Ephesians 1:11, Ephesians 2:8

Topics: "Ministers"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of willingly and cheerfully giving to God. He highlights the greatness of God's love and what He has done for us as the motivation for our giving. The preacher criticizes the tendency in some ministries to focus more on what people can do for God rather than emphasizing what God has done for them. He explains that this approach can lead to guilt and frustration among believers. The sermon also discusses the concept of salvation as God's work and the corresponding response of believers in serving God.

Transcript

Book of Ephesians, chapter 1. As we noted yesterday, the first thing is relationship. Our relationship must be established with God, and that relationship is in Christ Jesus. Apart from Jesus Christ, you can have no true relationship with God.

And any thought of relationship with God apart from Jesus Christ is only a pseudo-relationship. There is no true relationship with God apart from Jesus Christ. So the first thing that he establishes is relationship.

And then the blessings of that relationship, all that is ours through that relationship. So we are chosen in him. And all of these blessings come as the result of that relationship in Christ Jesus.

And we told you yesterday that you should go through the first chapter and note the blessings that are yours. And verse 4, chosen in him, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ. You see, this blessing of being predestined and adopted as God's child is by Jesus Christ.

In whom, well, 6th verse, accepted in the beloved. God accepts you in Christ. He cannot accept you outside of Christ.

There is no basis of acceptance of you outside of Christ, but accepted in the beloved. I love that. And in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of

his grace.

And then having made known unto us the mysteries of his will, that he might gather together in one all things in Christ, even in him. Verse 11, in whom you have obtained an inheritance, that we should be to the praise of the glory of his grace who first trusted in Christ. So all of these blessings and then finally in verse 13, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession under the praise of his glory.

So these are the spiritual blessings. Paul enumerates them. They're all as a result of relationship in Christ Jesus, by whom, through whom, in whom.

We have received all of these wonderful things. Then Paul closes off the first chapter with a prayer. I think that the prayers of Paul are deserving just a study in themselves.

And I have no intention to go into that because that is not the direction we're moving in these studies as we are looking for the church and the purposes of the church and the ministry of the church in a biblical setting and Ephesians being our pattern. So this prayer though is something that deserves a lot of meditation. And I would encourage you to get in and really meditate in this prayer.

Now in chapter two, we're going on back to the subject of the blessings that we have through relationship. You know, there is an interesting balance in the Christian life. God has done many things for you, for me.

That work of God in our behalf. Now there is always the corresponding our work for God in response to what he has done for us. My responding to the grace of God, my responding to the goodness of God.

And you'll find that the scripture lays out what God has done and Paul in the first three chapters is going to lay out for us what God has done for us. Then he is going to lay out what we are supposed to do for him. Now you'll find this pattern throughout the New Testament.

God's work and then man's work. Now as we study it, we find that God's work is always the greater and is always more. And mine is just sort of the response to that which God has done.

For instance, Peter said, Thank God who has begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. To an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God. That's all God's work.

He's begotten you again to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. An inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, fades not away. He's reserved it in heaven for you who are kept.

He even is keeping you for that. And then he gives us our part through faith. But God's part has to be first.

The faith would not have validity unless God had already done these things. And so God's part. So in Ephesians, the first three chapters, we're dealing with God's part.

The scripture is always interested in, first of all, what God has done for you. Then your response to God for that which he has done for you. Now, many times in our preaching, we frustrate the church because we are emphasizing their part.

What you should be doing for God. And so often, you'll find that the greater emphasis upon the ministry is the minister emphasizing to the people what they should be doing for God. And even has worked it out for

them in a neat little program.

Now you ought to be witnessing for God and this is how you witness. You ought to be giving to God and this is the amount. You ought to be serving God and this is how you should serve.

And preaching usually is overemphasizing or emphasizing more, and that's an overemphasis, on man's part. And not enough of God's part. Now the scripture always emphasized more God's part.

And then our automatic response to what God has done. But in our desire to get our program rolling and desire to get the church going, we start laying upon people their part. What you should be doing for God.

And here we find people then trying to do for God something that they have not yet been equipped to do or enabled to do by the Spirit. Because they don't yet know fully the relationship and the benefits of that relationship. So many times people are pressed into a service for God, because I ought to serve the Lord, without first of all realizing what they are, what they have, what they can become through their relationship with God in Christ Jesus.

So Paul doesn't talk a thing about the walk until he first of all establishes what they are. He gets them positioned in Christ Jesus first. Once he has them thoroughly positioned in Christ Jesus, then he said, now walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you were called.

In other words, here is all that God has done for you. Here is all that God has given to you. Now respond to it.

Now any work that is not a response to the grace or the goodness of God is a work that is, in its end result, is going to have a tendency in my heart to even say, well, look what I have done for God. I've given this to God, look what I've sacrificed for God and all. Because I've put the works out first.

Any work that I do that comes from the response of God's grace in my life, after I have done it, I say, I'm an unprofitable servant. What I have done is the least that could be expected. I am responding to all that God has done for me.

I'm not then resenting it. I'm not becoming embittered. I have met so many people who are bitter against God and against the church because the church made workaholics out of them, made slaves out of them.

They were pushed into all kinds of service unto God, but they resented what they were doing for God. It became a heavy obligation. They chafed under the load.

God doesn't want you to give anything to him that you cannot give willingly and hilariously. And that's not just money, that's of time or service or anything else. God wants whatever you offer to him to be offered willingly out of a free heart.

And if you can't give your life to God that way, then don't give it. If you can't give your money, then don't give it. If you can't give your time that way, then don't give it.

It's better that you not do it than to do it and gripe about it. To do it and then go around and moan about all you've sacrificed or given up for God. I'm sure that God says, keep it.

I don't want it. He doesn't want any griping service. The important thing is that whatever I give to God, I give willingly, cheerfully, hilariously.

Now, I can only do that as I recognize the greatness of God's love and what God has done for me. And when I look at all that God has done for me, oh, the least I can do. As the song said, how can I do less than give him my best and live for him completely after all he's done for me? But you see, people aren't always shown what God has done for them.

That isn't the emphasis always in our ministry. We're emphasizing to men what you can do for God, what God wants you to do for him. And actually, what you are doing is you are creating a congregation filled with guilt-ridden, frustrated saints.

Because as you're telling them what they ought to be doing for God, they bow their heads and say, yes, I know I ought to be doing that. As you tell them how miserable a Christian they are, they bow their heads and say, yes, I know I'm a miserable Christian. I'm a miserable witness.

I'm a failure. I don't love as I should. I don't pray as I should.

I don't give as I should. I don't serve as I should. And here you're laying it on them week after week, and they're just getting more guilt-ridden all the time.

But along with the guilt feelings, there is a frustration. Oh, God, I want to serve you. Oh, God, I promise I'm going to do better.

Oh, Lord, you know. And the frustration, I want to do. I can't.

I fail. And the guilt-frustrated saints, they're all over the country. Why? Because they have never been taught the resources and the blessings that are theirs by relationship with Jesus Christ.

They've never thoroughly been established in Christ Jesus. They're not aware of all of the resources that are made available to them by God. Because man's part has been emphasized rather than God's part emphasized in their lives.

They've tried to do it in their own strength, in their own abilities, and they just have never come to that realization that God does not require us to do a single thing but what he will and has enabled us to do it. I'm certain that we've pushed many people into works that God never intended for them to do. And no wonder they were failures at it.

And then they feel a failure at Christianity. I'm so anxious to see this program go. I'm conscripting people.

I'm pressuring people. I'm pushing people to get involved. Maybe God doesn't want them involved.

Maybe that isn't what God has for them. I was reading in Samuel where it said, for by strength shall no man prevail. That is by our own strength.

And yet we've been trying to push people into these things before establishing them in what they are. So as we get into chapter two, we continue now in what God has done for you. And you hath he quickened or made alive who were dead in trespasses and sins.

Once you were totally dead unto God. Dead because of your trespasses and your sins. God said the soul that sinneth it shall surely die.

Notice he uses trespasses and sins and there is a difference between the two. Sin has as its root meaning missing the mark. Now, I would like to suggest that many times I've done my best to hit the mark, but I'm just a poor shot.

And I missed it. In other words, sin isn't always a willful deliberate act. Sin can result from just a weakness, a weakness that I hate, a weakness that I detest.

An inability and a failure in myself to hit the mark. You say, well, shame on you. Well, if I'll tell you what the mark is, shame on you.

It's perfection. Be perfect even as my father in heaven is perfect. So you can hit that mark.

Great. Now we try. And because I am weak and I've missed so many times, it's not an excuse to not keep trying to hit the mark.

We're never excusing our weaknesses, but just the recognition of the fact that sin means missing the mark and thus it is not always a willful deliberate missing of the mark. It can be actually a heartbreak experience. I'm doing my best.

I'm trying my hardest, but still I have failed. Whereas a trespass is a deliberate willful disobedience to God. It's not even trying.

It's almost defiant. God has said, don't cross over that line. I step over it and say, okay, what are you going to do about it? I have trespassed knowingly, willfully.

That's a trespass. Now, trespasses and sins, either, both of them alienate me from God. I cannot make God a party to my sin or to my trespass.

And yet in this relationship in Christ Jesus, actually Christ has become a party to your life. And Paul in writing to the Corinthians shows the total inconsistency of relationship and then the relationship with Christ and bringing Christ into a ungodly relationship because he's indwelling you. In other words, if you, with Christ dwelling in you, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, if you actually have sexual relationships with a prostitute, he said, then you're making Christ a part of that horrible act.

You're bringing Christ into that. And he shows how the inconsistency of that, making him one. You've been one with Christ.

Now, if you join yourself to a prostitute, you're making Christ one with a prostitute. That can't be. We need to realize that this relationship with Christ, being one with him, makes him a party of all that we do, drawing Christ into this.

Now, sin and trespasses, the effect of death, but you as he made alive who were dead in your trespasses and sins. And of course, this is a reference to your life prior to coming to Jesus Christ. For now, if we walk in the light as he is in the light, having come to him, the blood of Jesus Christ, God's son, is continually cleansing us from all sins.

And if we say we have no sin, we're only deceiving ourselves. The truth isn't in us. But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

And if we say we have not sinned, then we make him a liar. And his truth isn't in us. So, this relationship is a great relationship because it's one of a continual cleansing.

You hath he made alive. You were dead in your trespasses and sins. Now you're alive unto God through Jesus Christ.

Wherein in time past ye walked, according to the course of this world. The word walked here, and in Greek there are a couple of words for walked or more. But this particular word for walked is a word which means to meander.

Now, there is another Greek word for walked which does speak of a gate, of a directness, with a steady gate. You see a fellow walking down the street, a fast gate, head up, shoulders back, straight down the street. You say, well, he's going somewhere.

There's purpose expressed even in the way he's walking. He's on his way someplace. But you see another fellow, just sort of hands in the pockets, looking in the window, going out and examining a tree, looking at the fireplug, looking back in the next window, and just sort of, you know, back and forth and meandering.

You say, hey, he's not going anywhere. He's just killing time. There is no purpose.

He's not really headed anywhere. And that is what this particular Greek word is, is you meandered. In other words, life was lacking real purpose.

You weren't going anywhere. Life apart from Christ is without purpose and meaning. You're going nowhere.

You're just passing time till your time comes. But your life is lacking in definition and in purpose. So, you at one time were meandering, living a life without real meaning or purpose, going nowhere, getting nowhere, as you meandered according to the course of this world.

The word course is the word used also for weathervane. Now, you see the weathervane on top of the barn, and what does it do? It points in whatever direction the wind currents are flowing. Now, as you look at some people's lives, their lives are just turned whatever direction the current or the flow of the world is going.

Whatever fad comes along, wherever the world's pressures are pushing, they just turn with it and they just sort of flow with it. They're meandering according to the weathervane of the world. Life without purpose, life without meaning, among whom also we all had our, word conversation there is, our manner of living.

We all, our manner of life was this way prior to Jesus Christ, in times past, in the lust of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. So, he is describing our past life apart from Christ, the former life, before this new relationship, as a life without purpose, a life without meaning, a life that is governed by the desires of our flesh and of our minds. Man is a threefold being, body, soul and spirit in his fallen state.

In the original state in which God created man, he was spirit, soul and body. God is a superior trinity of father, son and spirit. Man is an inferior trinity of spirit, soul and body.

And as God originally created man, spirit, soul and body, spirit uppermost, man had communion and fellowship with God because God meets man and fellowships with man in the area of the spirit. His spirit bears witness with my spirit. God doesn't come and deal with me and my flesh in a direct way.

He deals with my spirit and from the spirit through the flesh. Not even with my intellect in a direct way, but with my spirit and from the spirit to my intellect. My place of meeting God and fellowshiping with God is in the spirit.

No man by searching can understand God to perfection. My intellect is not an adequate tool in the discovery of God and in relationship with God. It must be a spiritual relationship.

Thus, his spirit with my spirit. Now, in the fall, what precipitated the fall? She saw that the fruit was pleasant to eat, the lust of the flesh. Pleasant to look upon, the lust of the eye.

And if she ate it, it would make her wise even as God, the pride of life. So in following the suggestion of Satan and eating of this fruit of which God said she should not eat, she allowed the fleshly desires to dominate. And in allowing the fleshly desires to dominate, she became then inverted and became body, soul, and spirit.

The mind now no longer being ruled over by the spirit, but the mind now being ruled over by the flesh. And the spirit being subjected and subdued, dead actually, the consciousness, the awareness of God, gone, hiding from God, running from God. The new birth is what? It is again an inversion.

And it is God putting man back into his proper order. As they reported to the magistrates in Berea, these men who have turned the world upside down have come here. That's what the gospel is to do.

It's to turn men upside down. Well, let's correct that. It's to turn men right side up.

They've been upside down for a long time. It's to bring men back into a spiritual dimension of life. It's to awaken and make alive that spirit which was dead because of trespasses and sins.

And that alive spirit now again in fellowship and in harmony with God. But the former life is described as a life that is living after the desires of your flesh and of your mind. Now, as we look at man apart from Jesus Christ today, what are the controlling factors of that man's life? The psychologists have a word, homeostasis, by which they describe the body needs or the body drives.

Or, if you please, the body appetites. And they have listed the body needs, the biological needs or drives of man. And the strongest is your air drive.

Then comes your thirst drive. Then comes your hunger drive. Then comes your bowel and bladder drive.

Then comes your sex drive. And they've listed all of these drives of the body, the desires or the biological desires or appetites of the body. Now, the scripture describes the man, apart from this new relationship with Christ, as a man who is controlled by his body drives.

His mind is under the control, and he is thinking always of how to fulfill the body needs. Dead in his trespasses and sins, living after the desires of his body and of his mind. And so they have listed the sociological drives.

The need for attention, the need for security, the need for love, the need to be needed and all. And they've described these lusts of the mind or the drives of the mind. And these are the things after which the natural man lives.

This is the life of the flesh. Now, this life of the flesh is actually life on the animal plane. It's exactly what a dog does.

He lives only to satisfy his own physical needs. And many men are living as animals, living only to satisfy their own biological, sociological needs. No awareness of God, no fellowship with God, no relationship with God.

No wonder natural man seeks his best to identify himself with the animal kingdom and looks to the ape for a relationship. Because he is living as the animals live. But the Bible teaches that God created man in his image and in his likeness.

And rather than man being a highly evolved animal, he is a fallen creature. And the missing link is not on the scale downward, but it's on a scale upward. And that man was intended to be related to God, not to the animal kingdom.

And that is, of course, exactly what happens when you become quickened or made alive by this relationship in Christ Jesus. You come now to a new relationship with God. You have been made alive, and that missing link is found.

And Jesus Christ has become really the missing link, and he links us back to God by making our spirits alive again. And with that quickened spirit, I now have this beautiful relationship with God. And life no longer is without meaning or purpose.

I'm no longer meandering through life, following every whim of the world. But now there's direction, there's meaning, there's purpose. And thus, when Paul says walk worthy, he uses the other Greek word for walk.

Not to just meander, not to walk or meander according to the course of the world, but now with direction and purpose. We're walking. Then he goes on to say concerning the past life that actually, not only were we meandering according to the course of the world, according to the desires of our own flesh and mind, but it was also according to, or we were by nature, the children of wrath, even as others.

The sad, sad picture of the history of every man apart from Jesus Christ. No exceptions. You say, oh, but he's such a good man.

He's walking according to the course of this world, according to his own desires of his flesh and mind, and he's by nature the children of wrath, the child of wrath. You see, he's in the kingdom of death and darkness, and I don't care how high he climbs in that kingdom. There's a wide spectrum.

You have the street walker to the lady in purple or whatever. But they're all in the kingdom. Makes little difference.

This still describes them. Verse four, of course, is always glorious but God. In spite of all of this, in spite of what we were but God, who is rich in mercy for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath made us alive together with Christ.

God reached down to you into your helpless state. God's work. Salvation is God's work.

It was God who reached down to you. Man had attempted to build his towers to God. They always end in confusion.

It is interesting that Jacob on his flight from his brother Esau when he came to Bethel laid down his head on a pillow and he went to sleep and he dreamed and he saw the heavens open and he saw a ladder that was going up to heaven and the angels of God were ascending and descending on that ladder and the Lord spoke to him. And he woke in the morning and said, truly the Lord is in this place and I knew it not. But what did he see? He saw a ladder that went from earth to heaven.

Men have been searching for that ladder. Men have been trying to make a ladder. Men have been trying to build their towers of philosophy, towers of religion.

But man's efforts have failed to bring him to God because you cannot start with an earth base and reach heaven. God has built a ladder and Jesus declares that he is that ladder that Jacob saw. When he began his ministry he said, henceforth you are going to see the heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.

God has built the ladder. Jesus Christ is that ladder whereby men may come to God. But God who is rich in his mercy established the basis of our salvation for by grace are ye saved.

It is not something that you merit or can merit. By grace are you saved. God's glorious unmerited favor in Christ Jesus.

And he hath raised us up together. Now again we get back into the blessings. These are the blessings which are ours.

He has raised us up together and made us to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Now remember back in chapter one your blessings are spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ. So we come back to the theme of chapter one there, verse three.

He has raised us up together, made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus for it is there that we have these spiritual blessings that God desires to bestow upon each man. Now this is looking out to the future. In the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

In Christ Jesus, by whom, in whom, and now through Christ Jesus. One, his marvelous exceeding riches of his grace. Now I would like to suggest to you that God's love and God's grace for you is so great and so vast that it's going to take all eternity to reveal it.

Through the ages to come he is going to be revealing the exceeding richness of that grace and love that he has for you through Christ Jesus. I sit down sometimes now and I bemoan the fact that I just can't comprehend it all as I seek to understand God's goodness and God's grace and God's love towards me. And I drink it in and I seek to get more, but listen, it's so vast that it's going to take all eternity to reveal.

Throughout the ages to come God is going to be revealing new dimensions of the vastness of his love and grace towards you through Jesus Christ. For by grace are ye saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It is a gift of God.

What is the gift of God? The faith. You see, we are so anxious to get our part in there. We're so anxious to do something worthwhile that we are prone many times to exalt and magnify our faith because I want some credit somewhere along the line.

But God gives me no place for boasting except in him. God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of Jesus Christ. I can't even glory in my faith whereby I believe.

Where did that faith come from? It was a gift of God. For by grace are ye saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It is a gift of God.

And it's not of works lest any man should boast. You remember when God came to Gideon and told him that he was to lead the children of Israel into victory over the Midianites, that the Lord was going to use him to deliver the Midianites. Gideon objected because of his family's background and so forth.

And when he was assured that it was God that was calling him, then Gideon gathered the men of Israel together, some 32,000 of them there in Mount Gilboa. And they looked at the 135,000 Midianites spread out in the plains like grasshoppers. Well-equipped, well-trained armies.

Their companies and their camp out there in the valley. And here was Gideon over here in Mount Gilboa, 22,000 scraggly fellows that had come in off the farm. 32,000.

God said, Gideon, you've got too many men. I know these people. I know the wickedness of their heart.

If I would deliver the Midianites into the hands of the 32,000, they would go around glorying and boasting in what they had done. So you go out to the men, Gideon, and you tell all of those that are fearful to go home. Gideon went out to his men and he said, fellows, all of you that are afraid to go into battle, you better go on home.

20,000 of the guys packed their bags and headed home. 22,000 left him with 10,000 men. Now Gideon looked at the Midianites out there like grasshoppers covering the valley and he looked at his 10,000 men and the Lord said, Gideon, the men that are with you are too many.

Oh, wait a minute, Lord, 13 to 1 odds. If I would deliver the Midianites into their hands, they would be boasting in what they had done. What is God saying? I want the glory for the work that I do.

God doesn't want you going out and taking vows for Him. And one of the greatest dangers in the ministry to a man used of God is that you start to take the glory or the credit for what God has done. And the moment you start taking the vows for God, you're in big trouble.

It's not of works lest any man should boast. God has eliminated boasting by what? By works, no, but by the fact that His grace has done all of this for you by your believing in Him. And thus through faith and the fact that faith is the agency, it eliminates boasting because even that faith came to me as a gift from God.

So God has wiped out any area of boasting or glory in my flesh at all. He's just totally wiped it out, given me no place for boasting. Not of works lest any man should boast for we are His workmanship.

The word there in the Greek is poema. And it is a word that expresses more than just a work. It is a word that expresses a work of art, poema.

Now we actually get our English word poem as a transliteration of this word poema. Our word poem comes directly from it, which is a work of art. Now, when an artist is working, producing a work, what is the purpose of the artist? The purpose of an artist is always the expression of himself in his work.

A feeling, a thought, an inspiration, something that is within me, a beauty. I want to express it. And if my fingers are gifted, I may express it in a sculpture or I may express it in a painting.

It is something that I can see in my mind, a form of beauty. I want others to be able to share that beauty that I can see within. If I'm a musician, I hear it.

It's beautiful. I want others to hear and to enjoy the beauty. And so I write and I compose and I arrange that beautiful melody and the instrumentations that I can hear in my mind.

I always admire the work of an artist. I love to see them working. A person who has been gifted the expression of themselves in their work, to see them really get into it as they are really expressing themselves in their art.

Now, God seeks to express himself in this world. God has a thought, an idea, and he wants to express that thought and idea before the world. And you are his workmanship or his poema.

You are the expression of God. Your life is to become the expression of God. God seeks to express himself in you and through you.

You are God's work of art. The expression of himself before this needy world. It is interesting that in at least three places in the scripture I can think of the figure of the potter and the clay is used to express the relationship of God and man.

Jeremiah, the Lord said, go down to the potter's house and watch him work a work on his wheels. And so Jeremiah went down to the house of the potter and he watched him as he made a work on his wheels and the work was marred in the hands of the potter and he took and he crumpled it all up and put it back on the wheel and began a second work and all informing again. And the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, the prophet saying, you know, is not Israel like clay in my hands? And though it has been marred, I'm going to remake it and so forth into a vessel that is pleasing and all.

Paul uses it in his chapters in Romans in which he is speaking of the sovereignty of God over man. And what right has the clay to say to the potter, why hast thou made me thus? Why did you form me like this? Hath not the potter the power over the vessel to make of it however he wants? And uses it as an illustration of the awesome sovereignty of God over man. That's a figure that would frighten me if I didn't know the potter.

But when you tell me the potter is love and that his purpose and his plan for my life is love, then I can yield to the touch of the potter. Otherwise, I'd be prone to challenge and resist because I don't always understand every circumstance in which I find myself. There are times when I am prone to complain about the conditions in which I find myself.

And to say to the potter, why hast thou formed me thus? Why, God, did you allow this? Why, Lord, did this happen? Why, God? And I'm prone to challenge the potter except that I know that the potter loves me and every pressure that he brings against me to form and to shape has a design in his mind and a purpose in his mind as I become his workmanship, his poema, his expression of himself. For God wants to use my

life as the expression of himself in this world in which I live. The potter has in his mind a plan, a purpose for that piece of clay.

And apart from the potter's touch, that clay will always be worth very, very little because it is so common. One of the most common materials in all the earth is clay. And thus the value is so small in its native state.

But yet the potter is able to take a piece of worthless clay and by the deft touch of his hand he is able by his mastery to take that worthless piece of clay and make of it a priceless vessel. And when the potter begins his work on that piece of clay, the potter has in his mind what he wants to do with it. Now, the clay can only discover the mind of the potter by submission to the hand of the potter.

The minute I start getting my own self into it, the minute I start resisting the work of God, the minute I start going my own way, then the purpose of the potter is thwarted. The type of vessel he is seeking to make can be changed. I must remain yielded and surrendered to God if I am going to understand what God has purposed and planned for me as he works in me, his work of art, his work of love, as he expresses himself through me.

So you are his workmanship. God is working in your life today, forming, developing, shaping, molding. God's working in you today.

You are his workmanship created together in Christ Jesus. You can't get away from it. It's all in Christ Jesus.

Created together in Christ Jesus unto good works that God has foreordained that you should walk in them. God has already foreordained that which he has planned for your life, the purpose, the work that you are to accomplish for the kingdom. Your ministry has already been completely foreordained by God.

God knows exactly what he is bringing you to. God knows what he is preparing you for. Now it is after you get up to my age that you can begin to look back at some of those experiences in the past that while you were going through them, you cannot and I could not understand what God was doing.

There were times in my life I felt, boy, I really missed the leading of God in this one. God, you get me back on the track and I promise I'm going to be more careful in the future how I listen to your voice. And while I was going through those experiences, I could not understand them.

I was complaining, I was kicking, I was screaming against God. But now as I can look back, I can see why God led me through that path, why God brought me to that situation, why this had to happen, what God was doing, because all the while he was preparing me for the work that he had already prepared for me. I didn't know the work God had prepared for me.

I had no idea, no dream at all of the work that God had prepared for me. It was so far beyond anything I had ever hoped or thought or conceived. If just ten years ago you would have told me the work that God had prepared for me, I would have laughed and said, blessed are they who dream, you know.

Dream on, brother. And yet I can see where God's hand was in my life in even those discouraging, difficult experiences that I could not understand while I was going through them. And yet all the while God was working, God was forming, God was faithful as he was preparing me, working in me in order that he might prepare me for the work that he had foreordained that I should accomplish in Christ Jesus.

It is so glorious to be a servant of God for you are his workmanship, his poem. You've been created in Christ Jesus, together in Christ Jesus, unto these good works that God has already foreordained that you should accomplish for his kingdom. It's glorious to know that God has a plan for your life because sometimes our lives look like chaos, you know.

We can't understand and it looks so confusing, but it's glorious to know that God already has the plan, he has the work that he wants you to do, and this is just necessary preparation as he is equipping you and preparing you for that work that he has down the line. And I found that some of the greatest works of God in my life were the works of God wherein he wrought total failure in me by those times when I sought to take over and to do the work of God myself with my own ingenuity and my own genius and my own drive and my own determination. And God let me go ahead and use my genius and my drive and my determination to build the body of Christ and God let me fail utterly and completely.

During all of those great years of my life when I still had a lot of hair and a strong physique, good physical condition and all of these, you know, natural characteristics going for me. And God let me fail utterly in every effort that I endeavored for his kingdom in the energies and the abilities of my own flesh and he allowed them to all come to dust in order that after I had expended all of my genius and all of my powers and all of my good years then he accomplished his work. He brought me to the work.

But knowing what I can do, having it proved to me over and over again, there's no way that I can boast in what I have done. But I can only glory in what God has done through an old worn out man whose stomach hangs over his belt, who's out of shape and out of condition and out of gas really as far as energies and powers and drives that I once had, ambitions and all that I once had. Just, you know, gone.

Ready to go. So, God's purpose in your life to bring you to that relationship in Christ that he might work in you as he prepares you for the work that he has for you to accomplish. Already ordained that you're going to accomplish for his glory.

Then what's he going to do? He's going to turn around one day and reward you as though you did it. That's not real. But he's just so good.

Father, we thank you for your goodness and for your work in us today and we pray, Lord, that we might abide in Christ, his word abide in us. And Lord, help us not to resist that work of your spirit in our lives, but may we yield ourselves to your touch, to your hand today, that you might accomplish, Lord, in us your full purposes, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

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