

## Created for Good Works

### Pastor Gary Post – May 26, 2024

**Note:** The writer of Hebrews urges us to “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works” (Hebrews 10:24) and this message is intended to encourage you to continue to grow in your life with God and to allow God to direct and empower you into His eternal purposes in your life.

#### I. What Are We Supposed to Be Doing Here?

##### A. Post-Salvation Angst – What’s Next?

1. Many who have trusted in Jesus Christ as their Savior want to know what comes next
2. We want to live in a way that pleases God, but what does that mean for daily living?
3. Some feel stuck in place waiting for God to reveal his specific will for our lives so we know where to relocate, who to marry, which degree to get, what great spiritual objective to conquer for the kingdom, etc.

##### B. **Question:** What if He’s already told us all that we need to know?

1. Kevin DeYoung, in Just Do Something, puts it this way:

“I’d like us to consider that maybe we have difficulty discovering God’s wonderful plan for our lives because, if the truth be told, He doesn’t really intend to tell us what it is. And maybe we’re wrong to expect Him to.” Kevin DeYoung, Just Do Something

2. That is not to say God doesn’t care about us or how we live; I believe He is intimately involved in orchestrating the direction and events in our lives down to the fine details.
3. What I’m suggesting is that God doesn’t intend to provide us with a road map for our lives with turn-by-turn directions because he has already told us all we need to know.

Kevin DeYoung once again:

“God wants us to stop obsessing about the future and trust that He holds the future. We should put aside the passivity and the perfectionism and the quest for perfect fulfillment and get on with our lives. God does not have a specific plan for our lives that He means for us to decipher ahead of time.” Kevin DeYoung, Just Do Something

4. **Question:** So what if our lives are not about some secret treasure map that God wants us to painstakingly decipher, but rather about pursuing the eternal purposes that He is already working out in our lives, and which He desperately desires to partner with us on?

#### II. Created in Christ for Good Works

##### A. The Apostle Paul on the connection between our new life in Christ and “good works”

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

Ephesians 2:8-10 ESV

##### B. First things first: We are saved completely once and for all time only by God’s grace, which we receive by faith—without regard to anything we have done—good or bad.

1. What about our faith? Don’t we get credit for that? **No.** The syntax of the original Greek language where Paul says, “And this is not your own doing” refers to the whole process of salvation, including the faith to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Savior of the world. All of it is a free gift from God, from start to finish--nothing we can do to earn it.

2. As Paul reminds us: “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8
3. It is not just that we were a “pretty good person” who just needed a little help to be saved. **NO!** It is critical that we understand we “were dead in our trespasses and sins” Eph. 2:1
4. Pastor and author Dane Ortlund writes that understanding that we bring nothing to the table that would merit our salvation is crucial to continued growth in our life with God :  
 “We will not grow, not deeply anyway, except by going through the painful death of being honest about our own spiritual bankruptcy.”

Dane Ortlund, Deeper: Real Change for Real Sinners

- C. Being “created in Christ Jesus” means we are new people created for a new purpose  
 “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation [or creature]. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” II Corinthians 5:17 ESV
- D. What is the new purpose we see in verse 10 for which God has re-created us in Christ Jesus?
  1. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:10 ESV
  2. First note that God created us for the express purpose of doing “good works”—a theme that recurs repeatedly throughout the New Testament writings. (We’ll talk more about what “good works” look like later.)
  3. Second, note that God has already “prepared beforehand” specific good works that He intends for us to engage with. That is, before you knew Christ, before you were born, before the world was created—God knew who you were and what eternal purposes he desired you to partner with him in accomplishing while you are on this planet. MINDBLOWING
  4. Look at good works in the context of what Paul prayed for the Colossian Christians:  
 “And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;” Colossians 1:9-10 ESV  
 Paul prayed that they would 1) be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 2) to enable them to “walk” or live their lives in a way that was pleasing to God, and “bearing fruit in every good work” (note that good works bear fruit--that is, accomplish God’s eternal purposes), and finally, 4) increasing in the knowledge of God.  
**Those are all measures of growth and fruitfulness that God desires to see in our lives.**

### III. How God Works Out His Purposes in Our Lives

- A. Misconceptions about how God works in our lives
  1. We are saved by God’s grace alone, but then growth and fruitfulness are my responsibility
  2. We are saved by God’s grace alone, so growth and fruitfulness are God’s responsibility alone
  3. God’s perspective: We are saved by God’s grace alone, after which he partners with us by transforming our will and empowering our actions to accomplish his purposes in/through us
- B. “Work out” (put into practice) your own salvation—God is at work within you
  1. “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” Philippians 2:12-13 ESV

2. Note that we are not working FOR our salvation—not works righteousness.
3. Paul is calling us to put into practice our new life in Christ to accomplish God's purposes
4. God shapes our will to direct us to desire what He desires in any situation
5. Then God empowers us to "work for" or accomplish anything He leads us to do
6. Paul speaks of this empowering partnership with Christ in us:

"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."  
Galatians 2:20

C. Seeking God's direction in the circumstances of life (avoiding paralysis by analysis)

1. Pray and ask God to give you his wisdom about the situation—download it to you  
"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you."  
James 1:5 NIV
2. Trust God that He has given you his insight into the situation and shaped your will
3. Take action (consistent with scripture) in the manner that seems most prudent based on the wisdom God provided, knowing that He can redirect you at any time

D. We should ask for God's direction, but He has also given us the Holy Spirit and His Word

E. Be alert to where God is already working to create the opportunity for good works and join Him

IV. What Does "Fruitfulness" Look Like?

A. **Question:** What is "fruitfulness" from God's perspective? (Metaphor for positive spiritual growth)

1. Transformation of our character to reflect Christ's character in us  
"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control;" Galatians 5:22 ESV
2. Transformation of our behavior in all of our human relationships  
"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup> And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."  
Colossians 3:12-14 ESV
3. "Good works" as outward expressions of Christ's love that bring glory to God

Here is how **Jesus** described the impact of our good works:

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." Matthew 5:14-16 ESV

The **Apostle Paul** stressed the importance of good works in his instruction to Titus:

"The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people."  
Titus 3:8 ESV

B. What do good works look like? (Here is where I encourage you)

1. Paul tells us that good works are about doing good things that honor God and love people

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. <sup>10</sup> Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” Ephesians 6:9-10 NIV

2. Justin Dillehay writes: “Good works are practical acts of love that meet people’s needs.”

3. Examples of good works:

- Coming to church to worship, learn from God’s Word, and encourage each other
  - Serving in a volunteer role in Children’s Ministry, Greeting/Ushering, Safety Team
  - Spending time each day in God’s Word and prayer to deepen your relationship
  - Encouraging a friend going through a difficult season of tragedy, hardship, or loss
  - Faithfully walking alongside a spouse or friend suffering with dementia, cancer, etc.
  - Patiently laying down your life to raise children who will love God and other people
  - Befriending someone who has difficulty making friends
  - Meeting a financial need for someone in desperate circumstances
- “Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed.”  
Proverbs 19:17
- Working hard at a difficult job in a way that honors God and provides for your family
  - Praying with or for someone for God to act for their healing, encouragement, provision
  - **Others?**

4. Once we understand that “God is at work within you both to will and to do his good purposes,” we begin to see opportunities for good works and fruitfulness all around us.

V. Going Deeper with God: Abiding in Christ

A. What does it mean to “abide in Christ”

“The word for “abide” is menō in Greek; it can be translated “remain” or “stay” or “dwell” or “make your home in.” We could translate the verse like this: “Make your home in me, as I make my home in you.” John Mark Comer, Practicing the Way

B. Abiding with Christ as the key to fruitfulness

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. <sup>5</sup> I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup> By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.” John 15:4-8 ESV

C. Four benefits of abiding in Christ

1. We grow in our life with God and produce “much fruit” only through our connection with Christ
2. Abiding in Christ results in answered prayer
3. God is glorified (made known, exalted) in this world
4. Fruitfulness is evidence that we are genuine followers of Jesus Christ

D. **Question:** How do we learn to “abide” in Christ

1. Think of yourself as an “apprentice” to Jesus

“Apprenticeship to Jesus—that is, following Jesus—is a whole-life process of being with Jesus for the purpose of becoming like him and carrying on his work in the world. It’s a lifelong journey in which we gradually learn to say and do the kinds of things Jesus said and did as we apprentice under him in every facet of our lives.”

John Mark Comer, Practicing the Way

2. Apprentices to Jesus have three goals:

a. **To be with Jesus** (start with the Gospels—show example of journal)

Through time in God’s Word, meditating on and memorizing scripture, engaging God in prayer, worship music, personal and corporate worship, centering our thoughts on God.

“The first and most basic thing we can and must do is to keep God before our minds....This is the fundamental secret of caring for our souls. Our part in thus practicing the presence of God is to direct and redirect our minds constantly to Him.”

Dallas Willard, The Great Omission

b. **To become like Him** (How does it happen and how do we measure progress?)

“Formation into the image of Jesus isn’t something we do as much as it’s something that is done to us, by God himself, as we yield to his work of transforming grace. Our job is mostly to make ourselves available.” John Mark Comer, Practicing the Way

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” Romans 12:2

c. **To do as He did**

“This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.”

I John 2:5-6

“Love is the acid test of spiritual formation. The single most important question is, Are we becoming more loving?... If you want to chart your progress on the spirituality journey, test the quality of your closest relationships—namely, by love and the fruit of the Spirit. Would the people who know you best say you are becoming more loving, joyful, and at peace? More patient and less frustrated? Kinder, gentler, softening with time, and pervaded by goodness? Faithful, especially in hard times, and self-controlled?”

John Mark Comer, Practicing the Way

VI. Distractions that Rob Us of Fruitfulness and a Deeper Life with God

A. Jesus’ caution about distractions in the Parable of the Sower

“The farmer sows the word. <sup>15</sup> Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. <sup>16</sup> Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. <sup>17</sup> But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. <sup>18</sup> Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; <sup>19</sup> but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. <sup>20</sup> Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.” Mark 4:14-20 NIV

B. Satan doesn’t have to destroy us to make us unfruitful for God—he just has to distract us

1. “Michael Zigarelli of Messiah University did a five-year study of twenty thousand Christians in the United States and identified “busyness” as the number one distraction from life with God.”  
Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools, Tyler Staton
2. As Ronald Rolheiser put it: “We are distracting ourselves into spiritual oblivion.”
3. Our culture is addicted to activity and many self-medicate by filling up every “white space” so that they have no time and energy left to connect deeply with God and His desires for us.

C. Hurry is the enemy of the spiritual life

1. “Jesus was intentional and interruptible. There’s a word for that posture: unhurried. Hurry is the great enemy of the spiritual life. Why? Because hurry kills love. Hurry hides behind anger, agitation, and self-centeredness, blinding our eyes to the truth that we are God’s beloved and she is sister; he is brother.” Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools Tyler Staton
2. If we desire to be with Jesus in order to become like Jesus, we will need to create space in our lives for solitude in order to meet with Jesus daily in His Word and prayer. Much depends on it.
3. “The greatest issue facing the world today, with all its heartbreaking needs, is whether those who...are identified as “Christians” will become disciples—students, apprentices, practitioners—of Jesus Christ, steadily learning from him how to live the life of the Kingdom of the Heavens into every corner of human existence.” Dallas Willard, The Great Omission  
**Let’s determine to be with Jesus, to become like him, and to live as He did.**

Recommendations for further reading

The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’s Essential Teachings on Discipleship – Dallas Willard

Practicing the Way: Be With Jesus, Become Like Him, Do as He Did - John Mark Comer

Deeper: Real Change for Real Sinners - Dane Ortlund

Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools: An Invitation to the Wonder and Mystery of Prayer - Tyler Staton

Just Do Something: A Liberating Approach to Finding God’s Will - Kevin DeYoung

Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God - Tim Keller

How to Pray: A Simple Guide for Normal People - Pete Grieg

Mostly What God Does: Reflections on Seeking and Finding His Love Everywhere - Savannah Guthrie

A Praying Church: Becoming a People of Hope in a Discouraging World - Paul E. Miller

Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ - Dallas Willard

Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life - Donald S. Whitney