

Introduction:

Today we're beginning a new summer series we're calling **Everyday Faith**. Unfortunately, many Christians think the Christian life is fundamentally about what we do for God—working to show ourselves worthy or doing works for him.

But the truth is, the Christian life isn't about what we do for God; *it's about what God has done for us* in Christ AND what he continues to do in us *through his grace*.

This series is designed to refresh us in what God has done, is doing, and can do in and through our lives. Our calling is to *cooperate* with his work in our lives. This series is designed to remind us of some of God's vital work and inspire us to cooperate with it.

We're going to be hitting on topics like:

- Living from grace, not guilt
- Truly resting in Christ's finished work for you
- Combating anxiety by relying on the Holy Spirit
- Navigating trials victoriously
- Understanding how our confident future informs our lives today.

This is going to be a very positive and encouraging summer teaching series. I hope you'll stick with us through this all summer.

I know summer is a unique season.

- Some of us will travel.
- Some of us will host family and friends.
- Some of us will spend time at the lake, on vacation, or simply enjoying a different pace of life.

Because of that, each message in this series is designed to stand on its own. Whether you're here every week or miss a few Sundays along the way, you'll be able to engage with the truth God has for us each week. I would encourage you, if you miss a Sunday, carve out some time during the week to take in the message because this series will encourage your walk with Christ through the summer.

Each of the messages are connected by one common theme: *What it looks like to live the life Christ has given us.*

Our culture is constantly offering competing visions of the good life.

- Find the right career.
- Build enough wealth.
- Gain enough influence.
- Have adventurous experiences.

Those things are not necessarily bad, but Scripture offers a different vision. The Bible teaches us real, meaningful life is found by doing life with Jesus. Living life the Jesus-way.

[Transition] - Over the next twelve weeks we'll explore some of the greatest promises and realities of the Christian life. But before we talk about any of those things, we have to begin with the most important question:

- How does a person come alive spiritually in the first place?
- How does a person begin to change course in their lives?
- How do their hearts begin to care about the things God cares about.

That's exactly where Paul begins in Ephesians 2.

- Before he coaches us on how to live life to the full, he reminds us how we gained that life.
- Before he speaks about *our walk*, he speaks about *God's work*.
- Before he addresses our *obedience*, he points us to God's *grace*.

And what we'll discover today is this: You and I were totally and completely spiritually dead. BUT, God made us alive in Christ by grace. And he made us alive for his purposes—try to keep that in mind...he made us alive *by his grace* and alive *for his purposes*.

I want to show you the first part of this. The first thing Paul encourages us to do is remember who we were. Look at Ephesians 2:1-3

1. Remember who you were (vv. 1-3)

I think most of us want to try to forget the past. We don't want to think back about the dumb things we did, or rehash the foolish choices we made, or the sin we were entrenched in. Once we're saved, we just want to move forward. We just wanna get on with living forgiven and free.

But Paul seems to be indicating that there is value in remembering who you were. Paul teaches us here when we were disconnected from Christ, our greatest problem wasn't weakness—it was spiritual death. We were dead on the inside spiritually.

Notice how he describes our “spiritually dead” condition. We were:

- Dead in transgressions and sins
- Following the world
- Following the ruler of the kingdom of the air
- Following the desires of the flesh
- Under God's righteous judgment

All of these together describe a life that is being led along by a godless culture. A life that thinks it's free, doing what it wants, living the dream, and on and on. But, it's very much under the control of God's enemy, Satan.

[Quote] - As the great American Theologian Bob Dylan once said, “*You gotta serve somebody. It might be the Devil, or it might be the Lord. But*

you're gonna have to serve somebody."¹ And when a person is spiritually dead, they are serving the Devil who is described by the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians as the "god of this age."² The spiritually dead think they are living their best life. But they are completely blinded. They're spiritually dead.

[Illustration] - Please realize, a drowning person can still reach for a life preserver. A sick person can seek treatment. But a dead person can't help him or herself...at all!!!

Paul intentionally chooses the strongest possible word. We were not spiritually sick or spiritually weak. We were spiritually dead. We were led along by our passions, and the influences of the culture around us. This was the state of being you walked around in—dead.³

Paul says, these were all the ways you lived, the lifestyle you lived, the patterns cemented in your life. And all of it legitimately puts the crosshairs of God's wrath squarely on our chest.

[Application] - And here's why Paul brings all this up. Salvation begins with honesty about our condition. The gospel makes no sense until we understand our need. Gratitude grows when we remember where God found us. We certainly don't need to dwell on the past, or be defined by our past, but we need to remember who we were. We were spiritually dead, and helpless to fix it.

[Transition] - Then comes the greatest two-word phrases in the Bible. "But God..." Look at verses 4-7

2. Celebrate what God has done (vv. 4-7)

The first thing I want to celebrate in these "God turn-around" verses is that phrase, "Because of his great love for us."

¹<https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=bob+dylan+lyrics...you+gotta+serve+somebody&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>

² 2 Cor. 4:4.

³ James Strong, [A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible](#) (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 57.

[Illustration] - I feel like I've struggled over the years feeling or experiencing God's love. Paul prays in Ephesians for believers, "to know this love that surpasses knowledge." He's saying there's a deeper knowing of God's love that is beyond head knowledge. This is what I've longed for...not just understanding God's love intellectually, I want to feel it, sense it, experience it. I want it to penetrate me.

To help me with this I reflected on an exercise that a Christian Psychiatrist named Kurt Thompson recommended in his book, "The Anatomy of the Soul."

He writes, "We often consider how we should feel when in God's presence. But have you ever imagined how he feels in yours? Do you feel Jesus feeling delight, joy, and peace? If not, what do you feel him feeling instead? What do you imagine he looks like? How does he sound? What does he say? What is the tone of his voice? And then, what do you feel yourself feeling as you respond to these initiatives of God?"

He goes on, "If considering God's emotions feels foreign to you, you may want to engage in an exercise that may help bring you closer to feeling what God feels.

First, consider your feelings when you encounter this passage:

"The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing." (ZEPHANIAH 3:17)

Take a few moments in a quiet and comfortable place, free of distraction, and simply imagine, the best that you can, being in God's presence while he is feeling delighted to be with you, while he is quieting you and rejoicing in your presence. Imagine God singing about you."

He continues, "Until I wrote that sentence, I don't think I'd ever actually thought of God singing. Is he a baritone, a tenor, a soprano, an alto, or

perhaps some blended combination of vocal beauty that is impossible to describe?

The point is, he's performing the opera in your honor because he takes so much pleasure in you."⁴ His love for you is higher than you can imagine, deeper than you can fathom, and so much wider than you can conceive. And it's all FOR you!! He's for you! Does that register with you?

[Transition] – Paul is saying everything God has done in you is because of his great love for you and that great love stirs his mercy for you and activates his grace towards you.

Look at your Bibles...Notice in verses 4-7, the repeated emphasis on God:

- **Who made us alive?** God made us alive. This is a spiritual kind of resurrection. We have been enabled to come alive to the things of God.
- **Who raised us up?** God raised us up. The form of this word indicates this is not simply something that is possible, or contingent on something. It indicates it's real, it's actual.⁵
- **Who seated us with Christ?** God seated us with Christ. "To be seated with Christ in the heavenlies is a figure of speech meaning God considers us worthy and destined to be seated with Christ in heaven when we get there."⁶ This means, "God has decided to do it, and it is as good as done. We just have to wait until it happens. The significance of being seated with Christ is much the same as being seated at the head table of a banquet where there are many

⁴ Kurt Thompson. *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections Between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices That Can Transform Your Life and Relationships*. P.

⁵ Michael S. Heiser and Vincent M. Setterholm, [Glossary of Morpho-Syntactic Database Terminology](#) (Lexham Press, 2013; 2013).

⁶ Max Anders, [Galatians-Colossians](#), vol. 8, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 111.

important people. It is a privilege and honor, and it marks you as one of the important people.⁷

- And notice...verse 7...**God is going to show us off.** God's intention is to show for eternity the magnitude of his grace toward us. The word *show* actually means "display." In the same sense that an artist might display his canvasses to reveal his skill, so God displays his redeemed children to the universe to demonstrate his grace⁸

Literally the subject of every verb in this section is God. And it's his great love inspired mercy and grace that drives him toward you.

[Illustration]- Think of a child being adopted. The child does not earn adoption. The child does not negotiate adoption. The child is chosen, loved, pursued, and welcomed because of the loving initiative of another. That is what God has done for us.

[Application] - We need to cherish this and celebrate this. God's love is not based on your performance. *Your standing with God in every way rests on Christ's work, not your own.*

[Transition] - So far Paul's telling us the Christian life begins and is sustained through God's great love, mercy, and grace. So, what's our part? We are called to rest in the finished work of Christ. Read verses 8-9.

3. Rest in the finished work of Christ (vv. 8-9)

Let's unpack this for a moment. Paul says, "For it is by grace you have been saved." Grace means unmerited favor. You can't do anything to earn it. It's a gift to you. It's favor you did not earn or deserve, but you get.

⁷ Max Anders, [Galatians-Colossians](#), vol. 8, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 111–112.

⁸ Max Anders, [Galatians-Colossians](#), vol. 8, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 112.

“Grace carries with it the idea of benevolence being bestowed on someone without that person having merited it by his/her actions. God was not required to offer us salvation.”⁹

To say we’re saved by grace means salvation is God's gift from beginning to end. No part of it can be credited to you. The whole of salvation, the grace as well as the faith, is a gift of God. God chose to make salvation possible in this way. He handed salvation to you.

When Paul says it was “not by works,” It means you can do nothing but stick out a hand and accept the gift. *Faith is exactly that*. It is trustfully accepting from God what he has provided without totally understanding what you are receiving. *Faith is giving up on being able to provide what you need for yourself and letting God give what he alone can provide.*¹⁰

[Illustration] - Imagine receiving a gift at Christmas and insisting on paying the giver back. The moment you pay for it; it is no longer a gift. Grace can only be received.

[Application]- This means we can stop trying to earn God's acceptance. We can stop measuring our worth by our spiritual performance. Instead, we’re invited to *rest in the finished work of Christ*.

[Transition] - Finally, Paul concludes with another reason we can rest. We can rest in the knowledge that we are God’s handiwork, his workmanship, his masterpiece, all for his purposes. Look at verse 10.

Embrace God’s purposes for you (v. 10)

The Greek word (poiēma) is translated as handiwork, workmanship, or masterpiece. It gives us the perspective that we are a masterpiece or

⁹ Max Anders, [Galatians-Colossians](#), vol. 8, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 112.

¹⁰ Max Anders, [Galatians-Colossians](#), vol. 8, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 112.

work of art that God puts on display to show off his transforming grace in and through our lives.

[Illustration] - When an artist creates a masterpiece, it's not shoved in some corner unfinished. It's displayed openly to showcase the purpose for which it was created. In this way, God is actively shaping his people to reflect Christ and radiate Christ throughout their world.

[Illustration] - When God created apple trees, he purposed for them to bear apple fruit. When he created pear trees, he purposed for them to bear pears. Same for every fruit bearing plant and tree. He prepared them in advance to bear fruit according to his design in them. The same is true for us. God designed each of us for a purpose. Because of his great love for us, he rescued us from our "dead man walking" state and made us alive and renews us and transforms us to be able to bear the fruit he uniquely designed us to bear.

Conclusion:

Now, as we come to the end of this passage, notice the remarkable journey Paul has taken us on. He began with the darkest possible description of humanity: "dead in transgressions and sins." Not wounded. Not struggling. Not spiritually distracted. Dead! Thankfully, he doesn't leave us there.

The story of the gospel is not ultimately about what we have done. It is about what God has done. The two word phrase, "But God..." changes everything.

- We were dead, but God acted.
- We were helpless, but God intervened.
- We were separated from Him, but God pursued us.
- We deserved judgment, but God showed mercy.
- We had nothing to offer, but God lavished grace.

If you're a follower of Jesus today, your testimony is not ultimately a story about how you found God. It's a story about how God found you.

- Maybe he found you as a child growing up in a Christian home.
- Maybe he found you in a season of rebellion.
- Maybe he found you in the midst of a crisis, a loss, a broken relationship, or a moment when life wasn't turning out the way you thought it would.

But wherever He found you, the hero of your and my story is the same.
God!

- The God who loved you before you knew Him.
- The God who pursued you when you weren't looking for Him.
- The God who refused to leave you where you were.

And what's amazing is what this means for you...

- You are not defined by your worst failure.
- You are not defined by your greatest regret.
- You are not defined by the labels others have placed on you.
- You are not even defined by the mistakes you made this week.

As a Christian, you are defined by what God says is true of you.

- Made alive.
- Raised with Christ.
- Saved by grace.
- God's workmanship.

Maybe you came in this morning carrying a heavy burden. Maybe you're disappointed in yourself. Maybe you're discouraged in your faith. Maybe you've been trying to prove yourself to God, hoping that if you pray enough, serve enough, or do enough, you'll finally feel accepted.

Please hear this—The gospel is not about God loving the improved version of you. The gospel is; God loved you when you were dead in sin and made you alive through Jesus Christ. This means...

- You don't *work for* God's acceptance. You *work from* God's acceptance.

- You don't obey so *that* God will love you. You obey *because in Christ, He already does.*

Just those two truths change everything.

As we begin this Everyday Faith journey together, I want you to carry this one truth with you. The Christian life begins with grace, continues through grace, and ends in grace.

So, when you leave today, don't simply remember what you once were. Remember whose you are.

- You are God's workmanship.
- His masterpiece.
- His redeemed son.
His redeemed daughter.
- And He is still at work in you.

The God who made you alive is not finished with you yet.

PRAY