

DAY
4

Grace, Faith, & Works
Ephesians 2:8,9

Grace, faith, and works. These three little words often trip us up when we try to understand them. All three are important words, but grace is certainly the most important. Faith simply means a belief that aligns itself with God. This isn't just a sort of intellectual, brainy sort of belief, but heart belief, heart alignment. God's grace makes this sort of heart alignment possible. We are continually having our hearts aligned more and more with God. As we grow closer to Christ, our belief becomes stronger and stronger.

“The work of salvation, including the gift of faith, is all the work and gift of God to the believer, it is not our own doing or striving.”

Works simply means human activity. We know from scripture that even our best works don't save us. But, once we are saved, grace allows good works to be possible. Ben Witherington III writes, “The work of salvation, including the gift of faith, is all the work and gift of God to the believer, it is not our own doing or striving.”

We can never try hard enough, do enough good works, to earn our salvation. And so, we can't boast. We can't walk around looking down our nose at non-Christians. We can't have a proud attitude thinking that our salvation makes us any more worthy than our neighbor. Instead, we are moved into a position of humility. We know that we haven't earned our salvation. It is all grace, all the gift of God.

Tomorrow, we'll continue to learn more about good works.

Do you ever find yourself feeling proud of your salvation? Do you ever feel like you have to earn your salvation? Do you ever feel like God will love you less if you aren't doing enough? Pray a prayer asking God to remind you that your salvation is a gift of grace. Ask him to humble you. Ask him to align your heart to his.

DAY
5

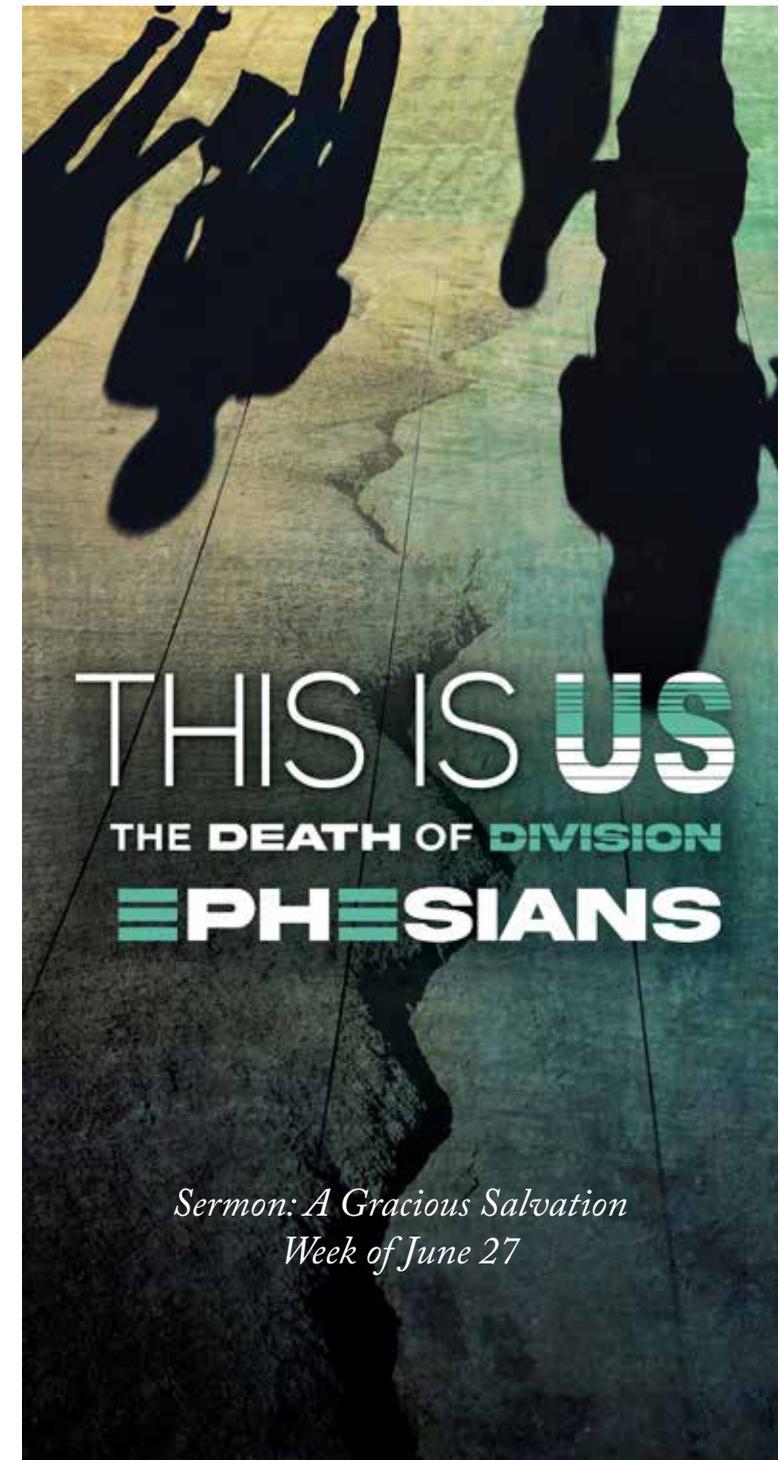
Saved for Good Works
Ephesians 2:10

Yesterday, we looked at the relationship between grace, faith, and works. We are saved by grace for good works. Our salvation should give us a rigorous sense of purpose. Life isn't about pursuing endless pleasure and play. Instead, God saved us to do good works.

Jesus showed us what a life of purpose looks like. As followers of Christ, we should follow him and seek to find our place in the center of God's plan and purpose. *The Message* translates verse ten this way: “He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing.”

There is so much joy when you discover your purpose, when you are doing what God wants you to do. For many of us, finding our purpose can feel daunting and difficult. But God uniquely equips us for our purposes. As the verse you read today reminds us, God created us with our gifts and abilities before the creation of the world. The book *Rooted: Connect with God, The Church, Your Purpose* says, “God is an audacious God, doing what it takes to turn the world back toward Him, restoring shalom as He intended it to be.” The diagram below, taken from *Rooted*, is a helpful look at what combines to give us a sense of purpose.

Do you have a sense of purpose for what God has for you and what he wants to do for you? Has there ever been a time where your purpose was made clear to you? Pray and thank God for the way he has uniquely created you, and ask him to continue to reveal his purposes to you.



DAY
1

Not the Way It's Supposed to Be Ephesians 2:1-3

Have you ever had the sense that things are not the way they are supposed to be? Maybe it was following the death of a beloved family member, or when you were navigating a particularly thorny personal relationship. Did you ever pause to think that we are operating in a world very different than the one that God would want for us?

Years ago, a Christian theologian named Cornelius Plantinga Jr. wrote a very well-known book on sin and its affects and called it *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*. In the verses that you read today, Paul reminds us that things are not the way they're supposed to be. He describes us as spiritually dead. This is the human condition. Paul doesn't say this is the condition of just a few of us who are really, really bad. It's everyone. We're all in the same boat.

Oftentimes, we want to minimize the wreckage that sin has caused. We downplay it or explain it away. It's not pleasant or comforting to think of ourselves as separated from God. But Christians can face our helpless condition with humility. John Stott calls this "the basic tragedy of fallen human existence." He goes on to say, "It is that people who were created by God for God should now be living without God. Indeed, that was our condition before the Good Shepherd found us." If we don't understand our true condition, we won't be able to truly appreciate all that Christ has done for us.

Even though it feels uncomfortable, take a moment to think about your sinful nature. What's broken in the world around you? What's gone wrong in your relationships? What were you like before you started following Christ? Pray a prayer of humility, thanking God for saving you while you were still spiritually dead.



DAY
2

Rich in Mercy Ephesians 2:4,5

Yesterday's devotional was a bit heavy. You were asked to think about your sinful self. But in verses four and five, Paul switches gears, reminding us of the powerful love of God, who was not content to leave us in our helpless condition. The Bible scholar F. F. Bruce wrote, "There is a way of release from the hopelessness of existence in alienation from God—an existence which is no better than death—and it is provided by God, because he is 'rich in mercy.'"

Last week, we read a passage in chapter one where Paul was telling the Ephesians that he wanted them to know God better. We can know God better by dwelling on his amazing qualities of love, mercy, grace, and kindness. Scripture often describes God's mercy: he is "rich in mercy" and he "abounds in mercy" and he "delights in mercy." Romans 5:8 reminds us that "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." We are raised to new life in Christ.

That's why we don't have to be ashamed of our sinful condition. Instead, we know exactly how much God loves us. We know exactly what he has done for us. We couldn't have earned this amazing gift of salvation, but in God's love, mercy, grace, and kindness, he gives it to us freely. Paul loves emphasizing the riches of God. In chapter one we read about the riches of his grace and the riches of his glorious inheritance. Here, again, we read about the riches of his grace.

Take time to really think about these qualities of God: his love, mercy, grace, and kindness. How has God lavished his love on you? How has he shown you mercy? Where have you been a recipient of his grace? What in your story is evidence of his kindness? Take the time to pray a prayer of thanksgiving for God's riches and pray that you will continue to know him more.

DAY
3

A New Position Ephesians 2:6,7

Because of God's love, mercy, grace, and kindness, we have a new position. Verse one described us as dead in our sins, but verse six says that we are raised with Christ. What does it mean to be raised with Christ? Ben Witherington III writes, "by the Christian's salvation experience we now have not only new life but power over sin, which previously believers did not by nature have." God has moved us back to where we are meant to be.

We often describe people who have not found Jesus as "lost." What does it truly mean to be lost? If you were hiking and got lost in the woods, you might describe yourself as off-track, wandering, straying, not where you were meant to be. When we lose a possession, it is because it is not in the place where we expected to find it. Through God's work, we are being restored to where we are meant to be.



Core to our Christian identity is this idea that we are "found." We are restored. We are "in Christ." John Stott writes, "We were dead, but have been made spiritually alive and alert. We were in captivity, but have been enthroned." *The Message* puts it this way: "Now God has us where he wants us."

Being "in Christ" is so much more significant than we think. The Bible is full of references to the significance of being "in Christ," so many more than we can possibly cover in a single day's devotional. Read Romans 8:1, 1 Corinthians 1:2, 2 Corinthians 5:17, and Galatians 3:26 for just a sampling of some of these verses.

What do you think of when you think of the word "found"? What is your new life like "in Christ"? Ask God to continue to reveal to you what it means to be "in ethan-sykes-iISyBKOT2D0-unsplash Christ."