

SHAPED for SERVING God

“We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Ephesians 2:10

Elvis Presley's album of greatest hits was the number one album in the nation, 25 years after the guy died! Now in spite of enormous success, Elvis was, according to friends, an unfulfilled and unhappy man. He died of obesity and drug dependency at 42. And in an interview with his wife, Priscilla, she said this about her husband: “Elvis never came to terms with who he was meant to be or what his purpose in life was. He thought he was here for a reason, maybe to preach, maybe to serve, maybe to save, maybe to care for people. That agonizing desire was always with him and he knew he wasn't fulfilling it. So he'd go on stage and he wouldn't have to think about it.” Elvis didn't have a clue where to begin to look. In a sense, he was lost.

Today we're continuing *What On Earth Am I Here For*, and we're going to look at God's fourth purpose for your life, you were Shaped to Serve God. Elvis felt like he was here to do something, to serve, to preach, to save...to do something with his life, but he just couldn't quite figure it out. I don't want you to make that mistake.

The Bible says this, let's read it together in Ephesians 2:20, ***“We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do”***. Would you circle the words “do good works”?

You were made to make a contribution, not just to consume. God made you to make a difference. And what matters is not how long you live, but how you live. What matters is not the duration of your life, but the donation of your life. We're all meant to make a contribution. The Bible says we're created to serve, we're saved to serve, we're gifted to serve, we're shaped to serve.

So write this down, “My fourth purpose in life is to **serve God by serving others**.” Now, some people want to serve God; they just don't want to serve others. But you can't do that. The only way you can serve God is by serving others. You serve God by serving others.

Now the Bible has a word for this, it's called "**ministry**". And again, like worship and fellowship and discipleship, the words we looked up the last three weeks, this is a misunderstood word. When I say the word "minister" most people think of priest, pastor. They think of somebody who wears those funny collars, or a robe, and talks like "G-O-D" But the Bible says every believer is a minister. Now, not every believer is a pastor, but every believer is a minister. **Ministry** is simply means **helping somebody else in the name of God**. Any time you use your talents, your abilities, your background, your experiences to help somebody else, you know what that's called? Ministering. And you know what you are? You're a minister.

I want you to turn to the person next to you and say "You're a minister". The truth is every Christian is a minister. Any time you use your talent to help somebody else, you are ministering. You are serving. And it's the fourth purpose of your life.

Philip Yancey, a Christian author, in his book The Jesus I Never Knew, writes: *"My career as a journalist has afforded me opportunities to interview ... NFL football greats, movie actors, music performers, best-selling authors, politicians, and TV personalities. These are the people who dominate the media. We fawn over them ... Yet, I must tell you that, ... I have found our idols are as miserable a group of people as I have ever met. Most have troubled marriages. Nearly all are incurable dependent on psychotherapy.*

*"I have also spent time with people I call "servants." Doctors and nurses who work among the ultimate outcasts, leprosy patients in rural India. A Princeton graduate who runs a hotel for the homeless in Chicago. ... Relief workers in Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, Bangladesh I was prepared to honor and admire these **servants**, to hold them up as inspiring examples. I was not prepared to envy them*

"... Side by side, stars and servants, the servants clearly emerge as the favored ones, the graced ones. Without question, I would rather spend time among the servants than among the stars: [the servants] possess qualities of depth and richness and even joy that I have not found elsewhere. Servants work for low pay, long hours, and no applause, Somehow, though, in the process of losing their lives they find them."

You don't get your self-worth from success. You don't get your self-esteem from status. You don't get your self-esteem from your salary. The Bible says you get your self-esteem from service. Jesus

said to give your life away in order to find it ... because the greatest thrill in the world is to be used by God.

The greatest thrill in life is to be used by God, to be used in serving Him. And what does it take to be used and to serve like Jesus? Well it takes three things. Number one, write this down.

Serving like Jesus means being available.

One day Jesus was walking to go to Jericho and some blind men start yelling at him. And the Bible says this (Matt. 20:30-32): ***“Two blind men shouted ‘Lord, have mercy on us! Jesus stopped and called them. ‘What do you want me to do for you?’.”***

Now I want you to circle the word “stopped”. Jesus stopped. If you want to be used by God, you must be willing to be interrupted. Most of Jesus’ ministry and most of Jesus’ miracles were interruptions. All the people He healed –Almost every miracle Jesus did, He did it because He let Himself be interrupted. The Bible says this: Proverbs 3:28, read it with me, ***“Never tell your neighbors to wait until tomorrow if you can help them now.”*** Servant-hearted people don’t procrastinate. They’re spontaneous, they’re sensitive. There are hurting people all around us, and the wounded will not wait. We’ve got to help them now.

Now what keeps us from being available? You see a lot of us say “I’d like to be used by God. I’d like His power in my life. I’d like to serve God, but I’m just not available.” And what is it that keeps us from being available? **Let me give three common barriers.**

Number one: **self-centeredness**. The Bible says, ***“Forget yourself long enough to lend a helping hand.”*** (Phil. 2:4) Whenever you see a need right in front of you, guess what? God is giving you the opportunity to learn to serve, to learn to be like Jesus Christ. You know what the problem is? We hang this ----- on the door of our heart – a “Do Not Disturb” sign. We do it all the time. We say, “do not disturb”. “Don’t disturb my heart. I’ve got my agenda, my plans, my dreams, my goals, my ambitions, so don’t disturb me for the needs of other people.”

A second barrier to being used by God...is time. Time itself isn’t a problem. Time is a good thing. Everybody has time – all of us have 24 hours in a day, everyday, 7 days a week – isn’t that great?

But time becomes a barrier to serving God when we say, “I don’t have enough time for me to be used by God right now ... maybe later.”

Jesus once told a parable, a story about some guys who missed their invitation to know Jesus and be in God’s kingdom. They said they didn’t have time: **“At that time he sent his servants to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’ Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’”** Luke 14:17-19 (NIV)

You know, if we say, “When things settle down and I have more time, then I’ll serve / then I’ll be used by God” – If we say that, we’re going to miss out. Time is a huge barrier for most people.

The third barrier to being used by God is **perfectionism**.

Perfectionism. You know, wanting every thing to be perfect. Let’s read Ecclesiastes 11:4 together: **“If you wait for perfect conditions, you’ll never get anything done.”**

If God only used perfect people, what would get done in this world? Nothing, zip, zero! We all have weaknesses. We all have faults. We all have failures. We all have handicaps. But guess what? God uses us all. Why? Because God doesn’t use perfect people ... because there aren’t any. God uses normal people.

Serving means being available. You know what else it means? Serving Jesus also means being **grateful**. To serve Jesus, we have to serve gratefully, grateful that we get the opportunity to serve.

Jesus had an attitude of gratefulness in everything that He did. Jesus was grateful in the tough times. Jesus was grateful when He was criticized. Jesus was grateful when things were not easy in ministry. And the Bible talked about our attitude of gratefulness in Psalm 100:2. **“Serve the Lord with gladness.”**

Why do we serve God with gratefulness? What do we have to be grateful for? Why do we serve God, not with a sense of duty, but with a sense of delight? Not out of a sense of obligation, but a sense of the great opportunity that He’s given to us? We serve Him with gratefulness because He’s given life to us through Jesus Christ. He saved us! And if He never did anything else for us, that is enough to be grateful for the rest of our lives to serve Him. Look 2 Timothy 1:9 on your outline. The Bible says: **“It is He who saved us and chose us for His**

holy work, not because we deserved it, but because that was His plan.” He saved us, and out of the gratefulness of that, what He has done for us, we serve Him.



Five years ago, in 2015, Sue and I, our 2 daughters and a son-in-law got to go to on a mission trip to a small village in Guatemala. The level of poverty is a shock to us Americans. We take what we've been given for granted, and we forget what we've been given. What we really need is to see – even for just a short time – what our lives would be without the blessings we've been given.

Let me ask you a real serious question: what would your life be like / what would your eternity be like without Jesus? He saved you! He gave His life for you! We hear that so much that we often take that for granted. But what Jesus has done for you means that you don't have to spend forever & ever & ever in hell! For that gift we **SHOULD** be eternally grateful. For that gift, we should **WANT** to serve Him with **ALL** our days & with all our might. Not because we **HAVE** to ... but because we **LOVE THE GOD** who loves us **SO**, ... and it's our **JOY** to serve Him.

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We serve **BECAUSE** saved / grace. Not to be saved. Saved & forgiven **BY** grace **THRU** faith → **FOR** good works.

If you want to serve like Jesus, you serve gratefully with a generous heart. You make yourself available. There's a third thing. **Serving like Jesus means being faithful.** Faithful. Now what does that mean? It means you don't give up. You keep on going. You don't quit in the middle of your assignment.

At the end of Jesus' ministry on earth, Jesus said this in John 17:4, He said, ***“I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work,”*** circle that “completing the work”, *“that You gave me to do.”* I want you to be able to say that when you get to heaven. You completed the work that God gave you to do. If you're going to be like Jesus it means

you're going to serve as long as you're alive. Now you may retire from your job someday, but you're never retiring from ministry. Because God wants you to serve the rest of your life.

So what motivates us to keep on going? The Bible says, (1Corinthians 4:2) ***"The one thing required of servants is that they be faithful."*** How do we be faithful? What motivates us to stay faithful in serving God over the long haul? One thing that motivates ME is that we know that what we're doing really matters.

Now let's be honest folks, most of what we do in life doesn't matter. It isn't going to matter next week much less next year or next decade or in eternity. But any time you're serving in Jesus' name, no matter how small ... it ***matters***. The Bible says this in 1Corinthians 15:58, let's read it aloud, ***"Throw yourselves into the work of the Master, confident that nothing you do for Him is a waste of time or effort."*** Notice "nothing": that means it all matters, even the little stuff. Why? Because in God's book, there is no little service. He said, "Even if you give a cup of cold water in my name to a child, that counts." In God's eyes, there is no little service. With our limited perspective, we can't see how our small acts have big consequences, ... but they do!

Several years ago two teenage boys tried to come into a church service much like this, only it was packed out and they couldn't find any seats. So they turned around and decided to leave because they couldn't find a seat. But one usher said, "Come on, guys. I'll find you a seat." And that usher personally escorted them down to the center and set them in the middle and found them two seats. That night both of those boys accepted Christ and became Christians. One of them was Billy Graham who has now led millions and tens of millions of people to Christ -- All because of an usher who found two boys a couple of seats! We have no idea of the significance of small acts. So never belittle the little because it's all important. Real servants do every task with equal dedication because they know it all matters. It doesn't matter if you're doing something important that is well known or if you're doing something important that's not well known. It's all important.

It takes people to do a huge amount of volunteer tasks, just to be able to have this worship service today. The truth is ,all of them were

done by anonymous volunteers. And it's all important. It's all important.

Now, I know what some of you are saying. "There are plenty of other people who can serve here. This congregation doesn't need **my** help." Are you kidding? Spend a day with me. I'll show you a hundred unmet needs. Because there are always more needs to be met than there are people willing to get up off their seat and say, "I want to serve Christ."

Have you ever wondered why you're here at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Amherst, Ohio, in this year, on this day? I'll tell you why. You're here because God knew you had something to give back. He did not bring you here just to sit and soak and enjoy. He brought you here to serve. And He knew that you have something – background, talent, skill, ability, contact, network, or whatever, interest, hobby, whatever.

One day you're going to stand before God and He's going to say to you, "What did you do with what I gave you, the talents, the abilities, the background, the experiences, the freedom, the education, the family experiences?" "Well, God, I was a little busy with my ambitions and plan. I never got around to serving You." And God's going to say, "What were you thinking? Do you think I put you on earth to live for yourself? I put you here to serve Me by serving others."

Look at the next verse (Matt. 25:21). ***"Well done good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things so; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness."*** You know, more than anything else, I want God to be able to say that about you. Well done! Good job! Come on in and enjoy eternity and all the rewards I've planned for you." I want God to be able to say that about you!

Question: Is God going to be able to say "well done" to you? Is there anything in your schedule where you're giving back unselfishly, or are you too busy? Are you waiting for things to slow down? Or do you have other priorities? I make no apology in saying to you that the most important thing you'll ever do with your life is serving God in ministry. It's far more important than your career, it's far more important than your hobbies, it's even more important than everything

else you can think of because they aren't going to last. But this is. You were put here on earth to love Jesus back for all He has done for you – you were put on earth to love Jesus by serving Him, and serving His people all around you. There's no greater thrill! There's nothing more fulfilling.

AMEN.