

God’s Word for today comes from Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus, where he writes in chapter two at verse 8: *<sup>8</sup> 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.* This is God’s Word.

Every December, I go looking for the same box. It’s not big. I usually remember where I’ve put it in the attic. Inside that box are items that are priceless. Irreplaceable. They are Christmas ornaments, made by our son when he was in preschool. They’re made of nothing more than paper and photographs, held together by glue and maybe some tape, with some colorful crayon accents. But to this day, those ornaments occupy a position of prominence on our Christmas tree. They have to be front and center. Now why is that? They certainly aren’t the most expensive ornaments on the tree, and they’re not made of the most valuable materials. No, they are treasured for two main reasons—they’re treasured because they are one-of-a-kind, and they’re treasured because of who made them. Treasured because they are one-of-a-kind; treasured because of who made them.

Would you believe, in God’s eyes, you are like those ornaments? I hope you do, because it’s true. The apostle Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, “We are God’s workmanship.” You and I are the result of God’s creativity. And while that certainly includes our physical bodies, the workmanship Paul is talking about also encompasses our spiritual reality. The invitation and the ability to live with him and not against him is a result of his artistry. You can know without a doubt that you are treasured by God because of all the work that he’s put into you. And to God’s credit as Creator, you are a one-of-a-kind creation. You are priceless and irreplaceable, with an absolutely unique set of qualities, all of which have a purpose. Again, Paul writes, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Did you hear the purpose? We’re going to return to that in a moment, but first, I need to say this:

God’s workmanship did not come without a price. He labored over you and me with blood, sweat, and tears, and that’s not figurative language. When Paul writes in verse 8, “you have been saved,” it means you were heading for disaster without God, and He took steps to rescue you. That happened when Jesus came into the world, lived a perfect life by God’s Law, and then transferred that perfection to all people in his suffering, death and resurrection. That means the debt we owed God for our wrongdoing is all paid off, and that we can be regarded as Jesus is regarded—as a dearly loved, perfect child, right now, today. And this next part is crucial. How do you acquire the benefits of the work that Jesus did? How does that transfer apply to you? Paul explains: “...by grace you have been saved, through faith.” This faith is believing Jesus handled all of it and gives us the benefits as a gift. Just like a beautiful Christmas gift that we could never afford for ourselves but is given to us by someone else out of great kindness, Jesus

grants us perfect love and right standing with God, and asks for nothing except that we receive these gifts in faith; that we believe He did it for us. When you believe, the transfer takes place. What a refreshing thing. Isn't it awe-inspiring? We are God's workmanship. And with the work of Jesus firmly established, the work of saving us, we can talk about the work that we have been given to do—work that does not save us, but that instead helps others.

We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. This is such good news. It frees us from thinking, "I have to do good or else," and allows us to see that God has created opportunities for you to do good. You just have to show up and serve. Because you are one-of-a-kind, there is good that God wants you to do that is custom-tailored to your giftedness, interests, and abilities. And when you show up and serve, people around you have the chance to see themselves as God's workmanship, a one-of-a-kind creation.

Last year, I had the unforgettable experience of having a conversation with a young man named Alex Nsengimana. Alex was a little boy living in the African country of Rwanda during a time of genocide that tore his family apart and made him a refugee. He remembers bullets whizzing by his head, missing him by mere inches, and eventually relocating to a less than ideal situation. But one day, he and other children in his village were brought together, and given boxes through Operation Christmas Child, boxes that were filled with gifts. And for the first time he heard about Jesus; it was clear that these gift boxes had to do with Jesus, somehow. To quote Alex, this experience "planted seeds of love and hope" in his heart. This was incredibly important because there was hardly any love and hope in his heart—in fact there was mostly hatred and hopelessness—but the box and the message about Jesus that came with it was the beginning of a life-changing journey for Alex. He eventually received Jesus by grace through faith, and it was in the power of Jesus that he located the men who had executed his family members and forgave them. That journey started with a box; with an Operation Christmas Child box.

We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. One of the things that God may have prepared beforehand for you to walk in is filling and packing one of these Operation Christmas Child boxes. And of course, I know there are many of you who won't stop at one. If you're feeling prompted to do this, I'll just say, do it joyfully, do it generously, and don't lose sight of the reason for doing it—these boxes can plant seeds of love and hope in the hearts of children who have seen the worst of what life has to offer. You are absolutely free in Christ to do this good work—just as you are free in Christ to concentrate on another area of need—and you are free in Christ to do both! Isn't that great? Because the doing of this work doesn't earn us any points with God, we are free to show up and serve because it helps others. There's no pressure. God has prepared something for you to do that aligns with your one-of-a-kind abilities. You are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, and the world needs you to walk that walk.

