

**FROM DUST TO DIAMONDS – IN 40 DAYS
YOU WERE SHAPED FOR SERVING GOD
EPHESIANS 2:4-10**

By Pastor John Carlini, D.Mn.

M.I. AS GOD’S CHILDREN, WE ARE EXPECTED TO USE ALL OF OUR GIFTS, TALENTS, AND RESOURCES TO SHAKE THIS WORLD UP FOR JESUS.

**I. WHERE GOD FOUND US (V. 4)
BEFORE WE CAME TO FAITH IN JESUS, WE WERE TOTALLY AND HOPELESSLY LOST.**

⁴But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,

- A. WE WERE DEAD
- B. WE WERE ENSLAVED
- C. WE WERE CONDEMNED

**II. WHERE GOD PLACED US (Vs. 5-6)
WHEN WE CAME TO FAITH IN JESUS, GOD GAVE US NEW LIVES FILLED WITH HOPE.**

⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,

- A. MADE ALIVE WITH CHRIST (V. 5)
- B. RAISED UP WITH CHRIST (V. 6a)
- C. SEATED WITH CHRIST (V. 6b)

**III. WHERE GOD IS SENDING US (Vs. 7-10)
WHEN WE CAME TO FAITH IN JESUS, GOD GIFTED US SO THAT WE COULD CARRY ON THE MINISTRY OF JESUS.**

⁷In order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

- A. OUR PROMISE (V. 7)
- B. OUR PREPARATION (Vs. 8-10a)
- C. OUR PURPOSE (V. 10b)

**FROM DUST TO DIAMONDS – IN 40 DAYS
YOU WERE SHAPED FOR SERVING GOD
EPHESIANS 2:4-10**

By Pastor John Carlini, D.Mn.

This morning, we are in the 5th week of our Purpose Driven Life campaign. I want to draw attention to a common thread that runs through every purpose. All of our five purposes in life are direct responses to something God has given us or done on our behalf first. Worship is our love response to God. We love Him, because He first loved us. Fellowship is our love response to one another since God created the community we call church. He gave us brothers and sisters to journey with through life. Discipleship is our response to being born again, given the Bible, and a community in which we can learn more about God and His will. Next week we will talk about Evangelism. Jesus gave His life as a ransom for all people. We are called to tell people about God's love and show them the way to faith and salvation.

This morning, we are going to talk about Ministry. God has created each one of us special. We have different natural talents and abilities. We have unique personalities, and we have all been given spiritual gifts from God's Holy Spirit. The proper response to this gifting is to use all our talents, abilities, resources and gifts to serve God and one another. As we use our gifts, we will build up the church, both in numbers and in maturity. Ministry is the way we demonstrate our love for God.

I know how we really are. We say we love God, but are we really willing to put the work it takes into making a good relationship?

Let me give you an example: Our church had put an ad in the local newspaper; we were looking for a caretaker/housekeeper.

The next day, a young man appeared at the church. Before he could say more than, “Hello, I came to see about ...,” I was so excited I jumped in and started questioning him. I said, “Can you sweep floors, make beds, shovel walks, cut grass, run errands, fix meals, balance a checkbook and baby-sit?”

“Whoa,” said the young man, “I only came to see about getting married, but if it’s that much work, I’m not interested anymore!”

But isn’t that the way we approach our relationship with God? We’re content to come to church each Sunday and throw some money in the basket, but when God asks us to be ministers we’re no longer so enthusiastic about what it means to be a Christian.

Did you ever stop to think about what it really means to be a member of a local church? At our church, it seems that membership means that I can vote, be a chairperson of a committee, or serve on the board. However, after studying this week’s readings I am inclined to say this when people come and ask to join the church and request to become a member; “What job is it that you’re applying for?” Why do I say that? Because God has given us many talents, gifts, and resources, and as a result of that, the main idea of this morning’s message: **AS GOD’S CHILDREN, WE ARE EXPECTED TO USE ALL OF OUR GIFTS, TALENTS, AND RESOURCES TO SHAKE THIS WORLD UP FOR JESUS.** Ministry is simply using all that God has given us to build up His church. If we dedicate ourselves to loving God and loving one another by serving God and serving one another, our church will grow both in numbers and maturity. We can shake up this neighborhood. We can shake up the city of Chicago. We can shake up the world.

I. WHERE GOD FOUND US (V. 4)

BEFORE WE CAME TO FAITH IN JESUS, WE WERE TOTALLY AND HOPELESSLY LOST.

⁴But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,

I have already said that finding our purpose is always in response to something God has given us or done for us. Verse 4 describes where God found us: **BEFORE WE CAME TO FAITH IN JESUS, WE WERE TOTALLY AND HOPELESSLY LOST.**

We may gloss over this as we read our English versions; but in the Greek, it's dramatic. The verse reads, "But God, full of mercy, because of His great love He loved us with." I want you to feel the full impact about the phrase, "But God!" In verses 1-3, the Apostle Paul told the Ephesians that before we gave our lives to Christ, we were dead. We weren't just sick or handicapped. We were dead. People today think that following any religion or any philosophy is equally valid. The Apostle Paul strongly refutes that. Since this is not the passage we are studying today, let me summarize the 3 verses that precede this morning's text; Paul said that the unbeliever's life is characterized by three types of behaviors, and this type of lifestyle carries 3 consequences.

First, the unbeliever's life is characterized by his conformity to following this world. Unbelievers let their culture, their race; their communities, their friends, television and popular opinion determine their values. My guess is that most of us have come to value success, money, security, and a good-looking physical appearance as valuable. We live in a materialistic world. People chase after money, power, success, buying things, and popularity. Without Jesus we all just follow the crowd and accept their values.

Second, the unbeliever's life is characterized by disobedience. Unbelievers have no use to follow the commands of God. They don't care to read or study the Bible. They are content to simply discredit it so they won't have to deal with the claims of Jesus.

And third, it naturally follows that if we are not living to please God, then we are living to please ourselves. This sin of selfishness and self-centeredness is so deeply ingrained in our natures that we spend our lifetimes fighting against it.

So as unbelievers, our lives were characterized by following the crowd, disobeying God, and gratifying our sinful natures. This leaves us with 3 states of being.

A. WE WERE DEAD

First of all, we were dead. If you want to match this with our personality characteristics, being spiritually dead is a direct result of our disobedience. The Bible says that the wages of sin is death. Keep in mind what we have been saying for the past five weeks. We were all born into this world physically alive, but spiritually dead. Spiritually we had no appetite, no potential, and no hope.

B. WE WERE ENSLAVED

Second, we were slaves. Because we have chosen to follow the world, we have become enslaved to the thoughts of this world. In his letter to the church in Rome, Paul said that we should quit letting the world squeeze us into its mold. However, before we became Christians, we were enslaved to the devil and the sin that characterizes life lived in this world apart from God. We were slaves to our fears, our lusts, and our desires. All these were fueled and energized by the devil himself.

C. WE WERE CONDEMNED

Third, because of our focus on gratifying our lusts and desires, disobedience and rebellion characterized our lives. So we were condemned. We were objects of God's wrath. The word objects could also be translated children. We were children of God's wrath. Our destinies were to spend eternity in hell, separated from God.

I want us to understand the power of verse 4. We were dead. We were enslaved. We were children of God's wrath. We had no hope or no inclination to turn to God. **BUT GOD**, who is overflowing in mercy, who has this incredible, irrational, and illogical love for us, came looking for us. We did not go looking for Jesus. Jesus came looking for us. This is the place God found us: **BEFORE WE CAME TO FAITH IN JESUS, WE WERE TOTALLY AND HOPELESSLY LOST.**

II. WHERE GOD PLACED US (Vs. 5-6)
WHEN WE CAME TO FAITH IN JESUS, GOD GAVE US NEW LIVES FILLED WITH HOPE.

⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,

But God did not leave us where He found us. Verses 5-6 describe where God placed us: **WHEN WE CAME TO FAITH IN JESUS, GOD GAVE US NEW LIVES FILLED WITH HOPE.** Jesus came to find us. In becoming a human, Jesus identified with us. In fact, even though He was sinless and perfect, He allowed Himself to have our sin and rebellion and self-centeredness all transferred to Him. He allowed Himself to be tortured, humiliated, and killed in order to identify with us in death. Jesus took our sin to the grave.

And now in these two verses, we will see how we are now invited to be identified with Jesus in His life. Those of you who have been raised in churches that recite creeds will know they say three things about Jesus: He rose from the dead, He

ascended into heaven, and He is seated at the right hand of the Father. In these two verses Paul identifies us with Christ in all three stages by adding the prefix “syn” to each word which means “together with.”

A. MADE ALIVE WITH CHRIST (V. 5)

In verse 5, because of God’s overflowing mercy and love for us, we were made alive with Christ. When we gave our lives to Jesus in faith, God saved us. We were made alive. Just as sure as Jesus rose from the dead, we too were given resurrection life when we identified with Him in faith. We were born again, this time spiritually.

B. RAISED UP WITH CHRIST (V. 6a)

In the first half of verse 6, we are described as being raised up with Christ. After His resurrection, Jesus spent 40 days with His friends. Then He ascended back to heaven on a cloud. We are continually being saved; we have been raised up to new lives. Before our lives were characterized by self-centeredness, enslavement to the world, death, and eternal condemnation. But now as believers, our lives should be characterized by love, humility, service, confidence, and life. We are no longer children of God’s wrath. We are now God’s children. I will describe this new life more in the next section. So we were saved.

C. SEATED WITH CHRIST (V. 6b)

In the second half of verse 6 we are described as being seated with Christ. We will be saved. When Jesus completed His mission on earth, He returned to heaven. He now sits at the right hand of the Father. The Bible says that He occupies the highest place of honor. One day at the very mention of the name Jesus, every knee will bow in heaven, on earth, and below the earth ... and everybody will confess that Jesus is Lord.

We are described as being seated there with Jesus already. I want to point out a couple of things here; these are all past tense verbs. The Apostle Paul is describing these things as if they have already happened. He is saying that we have already been made alive with Jesus. We have already been raised up with Jesus, and that we are already seated in heavenly realms with Jesus.

Think about this amazing mystery with me for just a moment. We occupy heaven through Jesus. Somehow we are present in heaven because of the presence of Jesus there and Jesus occupies earth through us. Jesus ministers on earth through us.

The other point to think about is this; we have been given new life. We have been gifted and provided with all kinds of resources that will enable us to fulfill all missions that God gives us. Our salvation is guaranteed because Jesus is holding a spot for us in heaven. If you are a believer, then you have been raised from the dead. Your spirit has been given life so now your body and your spirit are alive. Some day, you will take your place in heaven, but for now, we are in between stages. We are ascending. We are being raised up. Here is how we are to view ourselves; we have been given life. We are headed for heaven so we should spend our lives now doing heavenly things. God has placed us in a position which we are now to be ministers. That makes for an exciting life. The point for all believers is this: **WHEN WE CAME TO FAITH IN JESUS, GOD GAVE US NEW LIVES FILLED WITH HOPE.** We have hope for today, we have hope for the future and we have hope that we will accomplish all God has for us to do.

III. WHERE GOD IS SENDING US (Vs. 7-10)
WHEN WE CAME TO FAITH IN JESUS, GOD GIFTED US SO THAT WE COULD CARRY ON THE MINISTRY OF JESUS.

⁷In order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of

God—⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Which brings us to point 3? Verses 7-10 describe where God is sending us:

WHEN WE CAME TO FAITH IN JESUS, GOD GIFTED US SO THAT WE COULD CARRY ON THE MINISTRY OF JESUS. We have already seen that we have been identified with Jesus in His death, resurrection, ascension, and seating in Heaven. So what are we to do now? We are to identify with the ministry of Jesus. Jesus spent His life, bringing people to salvation, healing the sick, ministering to the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the people He came in contact with. Jesus died to give birth to the church. We are to carry on all these ministries as the church. Remember the church is not a building; the church is composed of all believers. Church is wherever we are.

A. OUR PROMISE (V. 7)

Verse 7 describes the promise. God has richly gifted us in every way. He has given us Jesus and the Holy Spirit in order that He might show the incomparable riches of His grace. Please follow the text here in verse 7. God intends to show the world of unbelievers how powerful His love, His kindness, His mercy, and His grace is. He intends to demonstrate to unbelievers how utterly pathetic and cheap all the things they have been chasing in this world are compared to the life He offers. And how does God propose to do this: By manifesting His power in and through our lives. That is the promise. God will show how valuable the life He has to offer in comparison to the worthlessness of the life Satan and the world has to offer, and He will do it through us. He will make it happen.

B. OUR PREPARATION (Vs. 8-10a)

Verse 8 through the first half of verse 10 describes our preparation. In verses 8 and 9 we are reminded that everything we have, all that we are, and all that we will become are gifts of God. We did not earn our salvation. We were not lovely, holy, righteous, or good in any way. God was not obligated to bring us into His family because we were so good, smart, or talented. He saved us because He loved us. When we get to heaven, there will be no bragging. Everything we accomplish here will be as a result of God's gifting and God's empowerment. We are saved by grace through faith.

Now remember salvation is ongoing. We were saved when we confessed Jesus as Lord. We will be saved on the day we die and will then be escorted into the presence of God. Right now, we are in the process of being saved. These are all gifts from God.

Now look at verse 10. It says that, "we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus." The word workmanship is a very interesting word. We get our English word poem from it, but poem has too narrow a meaning. It actually is broader than that, it is poetic, it is musical and it is artistic. Pay attention here. Each one of you is God's special masterpiece. You are one of a kind. God made each one of you special.

He gave you a unique personality and there is no personality type that is better or worse than another. God is the One who wired us. Some of us are comfortable in a crowd; some of us are energized around people, some of us are shy and very uncomfortable in front of people, some of us are talkative and some are more reserved. Some of us like to lead, and some are content to follow. Some of us are incredibly detail oriented and some of us are just big picture people. Each one of us has been given a

particular personality by God. We should celebrate it and be thankful God created other personality types as well.

In addition to our personalities, God has given us gifts. First, we all received a spiritual gift from the Holy Spirit when we became Christians. It is really tragic but many people have been Christians for many, many years, and have never bothered to discover their spiritual gift, and even those who know their spiritual gifts don't often use them. In addition to our spiritual gifts, God has given us natural talents and abilities. Some of us are musical, artistic, good with our hands, or good with our minds. God has given us jobs, money, and all sorts of financial resources. We have many gifts, talents, abilities, and resources at our disposal.

Next, we all have different kinds of situations that we function in best. Some of us like to create things, some of us like to improve things, some of us are artistic, and some of us like to investigate.

We all have different passions. Did you ever think about that? Isn't that great? You may be passionate about reaching high school kids; I may be passionate about visiting the sick and someone else may be passionate about political activism. God has given us all different passions. And, here is where a lot of problems start creeping into the church. Just because I am passionate about one type of ministry doesn't mean that you also have to be passionate about it. Over the years, because I am a pastor, I have had people come up to me and say, "The church should be involved in this ministry or that." There are two things wrong with this statement: The first is that we all have different passions and the second is a misconception of church. I usually ask the person, "Are you involved in this particular ministry that you are so passionate about?" If they say yes,

then my response is, “Then the church is already involved in that ministry. You are the church.” If they say no, then I say, “If you are passionate about that ministry, you should get involved in it.”

The problem comes when we try to make everybody have the same passion. God has given us different passions so that all the ministries will get done.

God has given us different life experiences and these experiences help us relate to others and they help shape our passions. Again though, we need to be good empathic listeners because we are all tempted to read our experiences into the lives of others.

Here is the upshot of all of this: God has uniquely created each one of us. We have different combinations of personalities, gifts, talents, resources, passions, abilities, and experiences. If we were to look at our congregation, the combinations are mind-boggling. You are God’s masterpiece and He created you uniquely to carry on the ministry of Jesus in some unique way.

C. OUR PURPOSE (V. 10b)

The second half of verse 10 makes our purpose clear: We were created uniquely to accomplish the specific works that God prepared for us in advance to do. So many of us go off and get busy doing our own thing, we don’t wait and analyze where God may be sending us. We often get burned out, become short and angry with others, and don’t seem to ever accomplish much. On the other hand, there are people who never try anything or have given up.

Let me give you an example; say you are an introvert, your spiritual gift may be exhortation. You like to work alone, and you tend to be a perfectionist. How do you

think you will do at being a children's church teacher? Not very well! You will be miserable and you will make the kids miserable as well.

Let's say you have a passion for older people and the gift of teaching, then you should be teaching older people. You may find teaching younger people uncomfortable and intimidating. Each of us needs to thoughtfully and prayerfully find our place in ministry. All of us have been given an assignment from God.

You may say to me, "That's a tall order John. I don't know where to begin." I'm glad you said that, because I'm here to help. This summer, we have dedicated the family camp to this very topic. There will be no preaching. I will lead you through a weekend designed for you to discover your personality type, your spiritual gifts, identify your abilities and passions, and see how God has used your life experiences to prepare you for a particular ministry. So keep an eye out for the registration forms.

Second, in order to follow up with our 40 days to a Purpose Driven Life and the family camp where will discover our place in ministry, we will be having a ministry fair sometime in the fall in which you can sign up for particular ministries. Keep an eye out for that as well.

The point is this: **WHEN WE CAME TO FAITH IN JESUS, GOD GIFTED US SO THAT WE COULD CARRY ON THE MINISTRY OF JESUS.** Jesus said that as we carry on His ministry, we will do and accomplish greater things than He did. That sounds exciting to me, how about you?

We will find meaning and excitement in life as we find our place in ministry: **AS GOD'S CHILDREN, WE ARE EXPECTED TO USE ALL OF OUR GIFTS, TALENTS, AND RESOURCES TO SHAKE THIS WORLD UP FOR JESUS.**

I'm hoping and praying that there will be a whole lot of shaking going on this year in our church, because in general, the church in the United States has not been accomplishing much. Jesus said that the way we shake up the world and make them take notice is by the way we love each other, care for each other and minister to each other. That's how the world will come to know that Jesus is Lord.

In his book, Kingdom Come, Allen Wakabayashi describes it this way,

“Is God out to change the world? Do you really believe that? Sometimes I wonder. How much do Christians believe that God is out to change the world? There are so many churches, so many Christians – reportedly two billion of us in the world. Yet the impact of the church on the world seems so small. Although many good things marked the turning of the millennium, the reality is that our world is full of incredible hardship, evil, and pain. And the church of Jesus Christ, the community of people who know the hope of the world, often seems silent.

Sure, some people are doing wonderful things and some churches are engaging in radical ministry. Missionaries go to Siberia to preach the gospel, and Mother Teresa types are out there feeding the poor. But that's the problem, isn't it? It's only the radicals who are out there doing things that help to change the world.

For the most part, the rest of us maintain a quiet existence that fits easily into the mainstream. We don't rock the boat much as we flow downstream with the rest of society. We tell ourselves that we are being different. After all, we are active in our churches, we give money to missions causes, and we actively pray and read our Bibles. ... But isn't God out to change the world? The early church started off as a little sect of Judaism made up of a ragtag bunch of nobodies preaching about a crucified Messiah. ... The entire Roman Empire was turned upside down. ... People were converting left and right, and as converts began walking in Jesus' ways the culture was dramatically altered to reflect the love and truth of the gospel.

Yet today the church seems so quiet. Shouldn't it be rocking the world?”

I want to ask, “Why aren't we rocking the world?” but I think the answer is pretty evident. We are not living radical, authentic Christianity. I'm hoping and praying that everybody will come to this year's family camp and that each one will find his or her

place in ministry. God wants to rock the world, and He wants to do it through you and me. Now that's a tall order. It can even be frightening. But have courage, have confidence, and eagerly launch yourselves out into ministry because God is able to accomplish great things through each one of us.