

Faith for Life: 20s
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The big question of our 20s might just be the most obvious of any decade. That question is, *What should I do with my life?* When we hit our early 20s (even our late teens to some degree) it truly is the start to the rest of our lives. No longer are we responsible to our parents as dutiful children required to obey their commands. We don't *have* to go school anymore even though we may. We've been given societies approved education and training and it's time to get out in the world. What should we do?

Many of us settle into our life-long friendships in our 20s; that includes an intimate partner for some in their 20s. But whether we get married or not, we start making decisions about what our life should look like. What to do? Where to work? Where to live? What communities to be a part of? If we get married, should we have children? How many? The options are almost endless and, quite frankly, it's kind of exciting.

All of this opportunity and enthusiasm leads to the big question of the morning (and of our 20s): *what should I do with my life?* We answer that question one way or the other. If we don't give that question much intentional thought, we answer it by all the smaller decisions we make. Do you know what I mean by that? If you don't give much thought to the big question of what you should be doing with your life, you implicitly answer it by the little decisions you make. And I believe most likely that means you'll put yourself at the center of your life. I don't say that as an insult, though the results to being self-centered are not admirable. When you don't purposefully and intentionally give yourself to plans, goals, values higher than yourself, you default on you. What *you* want and what *you* care about and what *you're* interested in will most certainly be the guide of your life unless you make a point to transcend you. And think how small of a life, of a purpose, it is to live for you. In a world that's who-knows-how-old, that's filled with billions upon billions of people, in a universe that extends beyond measure, to live a life where you're at the center, where you are most important, is so small, so myopic, so insignificant. Don't live for your most basic emotional or impulsive desires; think bigger than you.

That's probably one of the biggest dangers of life in your 20s: choosing a path in life where you're at the center. It's not like living a selfish life is somehow more acceptable in your 30s, 50s, or 70s (those are tragic in their own way). What's so dangerous about putting you at the center of your life in your 20s is that you're just beginning to chart the course of your life. You're establishing the routines, you're making the big life-decisions (like, marriage, career, values) that will mark the rest of your life; how tragic it is to start your adult life in the wrong direction? Now, that's not to say that we can't repent and turn from that path, and thankfully, God's grace covers all of our sins whenever we commit them, but there are consequences for getting this question wrong so early in our life.

I remember when I felt called to go to seminary in my very early 20s. I almost wrote it off; I almost said, "Can't do it! Won't work." Do you know why? I had just invested 3 years of my life studying to be an engineer and felt, "Well, I can't turn back now." I was wrong about a lot of stuff that went into that decision, but I guess the point I'm making is that it's hard to change directions when you start investing so much of your life going one way. Why not start the right way from the beginning; that's what I want to help you think about this morning.

What should you do with your life? Turn with me to Eph. 2:8-10 (READ). Eph. 2, especially the first 10 verses, is another one of those chapters in the Bible that every Christian should know really well. Do you know where Eph. 2 starts? It starts with identity. You were dead in your sins before you met God, helplessly trapped in the cycles of darkness and death. But God, in his great love, made you alive in Christ. He saved you and rescued you. There's great identity language in Eph. 2. Vs. 8-9 discuss the gift of God's grace saving us. Paul says, "God saved you by grace. It had nothing to do with what you can do or will do. If God saved you based on grace, you have nothing to brag about. The only bragging, the only boasting that we will ever do is bragging and boasting in who God is and what he has done for us in Christ."

So, that leads us to vs. 10, which provides us the answer to our question; let's walk through this. Paul starts by saying, "For we are his workmanship." That phrase summarizes what we just learned in vs. 8-9, namely, that we are saved by God's grace and not by our own works. And that being the case, that God saved us by his grace, we are his workmanship. We are his creation in Christ.

My father was a farm kid. I should qualify that; he was a poor farm kid. Do you know what that meant? Poor farm kids learn how to fix stuff; they don't have money to call someone else do. When I was a high schooler, I worked 2 summers on my uncle's farm; I'm very thankful for that. I learned a lot there. But my father grew up a farm kid in the 50s where he, his father, and older brother pretty much had to fix everything and make the stuff they needed. I remember my father's shop at our home. He'd fix mowers in there; he'd make shelves and almost anything else he or my mother needed. I remember snowmobiles all torn apart in our garage as he put those kinds of things together. So, like most kids do, I tried to imitate my dad. He'd make some sort of cabinet or shelving and I'd pound a couple pieces of wood together and make the crudest looking toy airplane a person could imagine. But that was our workmanship, his and mine. It's what we made.

That's the image behind the word workmanship. Something made; something created. And that's what we are. We are God's workmanship by the work of Christ (that's great identity word for you). Because of sin, we are broken icons; broken image bearers. But in Christ, God recreates us; we are his handiwork.

But God did this creating for a purpose. Do you see that? And that's the ultimate, or true, answer to our question: What should I do with my life? Paul says in vs. 10 that we are created in

Christ Jesus *for good works*. That's what you should do with your life; you should do the good works that God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Maybe you're thinking, "Is that it, Brian? The answer to one of the most important questions in all of life (What should I do with my life?) is simply *good works*?" That answer may not seem so profound, but it is, friends. Our world needs good works. We've got enough good intentions, we have enough talk. We need some good works. Imagine a world where good works are absent. One of my favorite inspirational stories is of the dear people who died on Flight 93 on 9/11. Tom Burnett, Todd Beamer, Jeremy Glick to name a few of the heroes who acted to save the lives of everyone on board - in the face of evil, they committed to do a good work. Was that an extraordinary event or occurrence? Of course it was. Was it an iconic, once-in-a-lifetime moment? Yep. But essentially, it was a good work at a critical moment. We don't need those kinds of works once in a generation; we need those kinds of works everyday.

And how do you know that the little, daily, local good works done by a stay-at-home mom, a teacher putting in the extra effort after school, by a student in the hallway between classes extending a little kindness to others - how do you know that isn't saving the world, too, day by day, moment by moment, good work by good work by the grace of God? What would happen if you stay-at-home moms stopped doing the thousands of little good works you do everyday? What would happen if our teachers stopped doing their good works every day at school or you stopped doing your good works at your job in your neighborhood? Our world would fall apart in the blink of an eye. The only reason why there is any good in the world is because God is doing good works himself and he moves and strengthens and inspires others to do good works, too. Good works are exactly what our world needs and it's what we should do with our lives.

"What good works should we be doing?" you might ask. Look again at vs. 10, "which God prepared beforehand." Those. Get what Paul is saying: if you've been made new by God's saving grace, if you are his workmanship in Christ Jesus, he prepared good works for you to do and accomplish in eternity past. Sometime, back then when God was working and planning his world, which included saving you from your sins, he also prepared works for you to do - good works. Works that would serve others; works that would glorify his name; works that would spread the fame of Jesus around the world so more people would be impressed and eager to know the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Your big calling in life is to do those good works; that's why God made you, it's why he created you in Christ Jesus.

I'm aware that this answer may not give you the kind of specificity you might be looking for. Should I go to this college or that one? Should I major in this field or the other one? Should I take this job promotion or not? Should I get married? You're right. What I'm sharing with you today isn't really about answering those questions. If I'm honest with you, I think we sweat those questions more than we should. I mean, I get it. I need to make a decision by next Friday. I have these three options. Which one should I pick? I'm not saying that decision isn't important. It is. But I am saying finding an answer to that question is not as important as organizing your life to

do good works that God has prepared for you. And here's why: doing the good works God prepared for you to do beforehand isn't optional. It's your calling. It's your purpose. Your primary calling (pay close attention to that word *primary*) isn't being a math teacher, computer engineer, medical professional, salesman, or artist. Your calling is to do the good works he prepared for you to do no matter your career, no matter where you live, no matter what community you're a part of or whether you are married or not. That's the non-negotiable calling.

I don't need to be a pastor. I was planning on being an engineer and I could see myself happily doing that; I have my fantasy job that I really want to do. But my true calling is doing good works whether I'm a pastor, engineer or whatever. I think I could say that I need to do the good works of teaching God's word and leading in God's church because that how he has gifted me. But I don't need to be a pastor to do that. Many of you teach; many of you lead; many of you take significant responsibility here within the body of Christ. I know I'd need to do that, but I could do that and be an engineer at the same time. That was actually the original plan.

The answer to our question is about a way of life no matter where you live. The answer to our question is a disposition of your mind and soul no matter your career. It's a posture and mindset regardless of your age. "I'm alive, I've been saved, to do good works in the name of Jesus!"

So in reality, my young brothers and sisters, you have great freedom in these areas of your life. Where you live, what you do, if or when you get married... there's really not a right answers to those questions. Get married if you want (maybe you're thinking, "That's easy for you to say!" I get that... let's talk; I know what you're saying and I think God has some help for you). Move to the big city if that's what you want; or work in this particular field. Go for it. Just do the good works God has prepared for you to do wherever you go and whatever you do.

But maybe you're wondering, "But how do I discover what job I should have? Or where should I live?" Well, I don't think we have to get overly spiritual or religious about those questions (and that's not to say God has nothing to do with them or doesn't care about them... of course he does). But, I do have some advice: what are you good at? What are you fruitful doing? What skills or gifts has God given you that can be monetized? That's what I tell my boys as we dream about their future. Now, why are those questions important?

Well, first of all, you are God's handiwork, created by God with particular gifts and skills. Why not leverage those for your future. It's probably where you're going to be most fruitful. It's most likely the area where you're going to make the greatest impact. Also, you'll probably enjoy a career you're good at more than one you're not good at. So, think about what you're good at and see what kinds of careers, what kind of life you can build with those skills.

Secondly, what does money have to do with any of this? Why should I pursue a career that I can monetize? Well, God expects you, he calls you, (as far as it depends on you) to be dependent on no one (*no one* includes mom and dad). He gave you a brain to use, hands and

feet to use, to monetize through work so you can take care of your own needs. If you're wondering where I'm getting that, it comes from 1 Thess. 4:11-12.

I'd love to see you 20 somethings out there feel a little more freedom with the questions like, "Where should I live?" and "What career should I pursue?" The sky's the limit! And I'd also like to see you feel called, convicted, even restricted in a certain sense, to the call of God to do good works for others in the name of Jesus. I'd love for you to say, "Whatever job I get and wherever that might be, I need to do the good works God has given me to do. Whoever my neighbors are, whoever are my church family, God calls me to serve them with good works. My goal in life is not to step foot on the highest point on every continent; my goal in life is not to make the most money, not to retire early, not to be famous... my goal in life is to do the good works God has called me to do. If I travel, may I travel for the good of others and not for me. I'm going to try and make money (maybe even a lot of it), but I want to use that money to accomplish good works. There is no retirement from the kingdom of God; retire from you job or career so you can give even more to the purposes of God and his church. I hope I make God famous to the forgotten, to the ignored, to the disadvantaged in this world. I want God's name remembered, not mine."

Do you see what I'm getting at? 20 year olds, one of the best things you can do is to decide these things right now. Decide now the goal and purpose of life. Decide now what you will do with your extra money; decide now what retirement is from God's perspective. Commit your life right now to a life dedicated to the good works until the day you die. Believe me, when you stand before God, you'll be glad you did.

Key Vs. Eph. 2:10

Questions for the week

- What did Pastor Brian say is a danger to those in their 20s? Do you agree? Why or why not?
- How should being God's handiwork impact 1) the way you think and 2) what you do?
- Survey your life; what good works is God calling you to in your spheres of influence?