

“SHAPED FOR SERVING GOD”
by Rom A. Pegram (9/18/16)

You were shaped for serving God... Folks, this is the 5th week of this series; with an introduction included, we’re now on the *fourth* purpose for your life! Just listen to this word from Paul (1 Corinthians)...

“After all, who is Apollos? And who is Paul? We are simply God's servants, by whom you were led to believe. Each one of us does the work which the Lord gave him to do: I planted the seed, Apollos watered the plant, but it was God who made the plant grow.”
- 1 Corinthians 3:5-6 (TEV)

“We are simply God’s servants ... Each of us does the work which the Lord gave him to do...” Did you know you were put on earth to make a contribution—to *make a real difference*? You weren’t just created to consume resources—to breathe, to eat, to take up space. Instead, God designed you to make a difference with your life! *Where many books today teach you how to ‘get’ the most out of life, God’s word teaches us how to ‘give’ the most out of life!* You were created to ‘add’ something to life on this earth, not just to ‘take’ from it! Out of response to God’s love for you, *God wants your life to give something back.* Listen to our main scripture verse for today—Paul’s letter to the Ephesians (2:10, MSG)...

“No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. 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.”

It’s all about God’s purposes for this life we’re in ... and *we find our purpose—our very reason for existing—when we begin to serve God, to help with his purposes...* This is the fourth purpose for your life; it could also be called your ‘ministry.’ God’s word gives us the details and I’d like to pass some of those details on to you today... First:

YOU WERE CREATED TO SERVE GOD. Again, Ephesians 2:10b (TEV) tells us, “God ... has created us for a life of good deeds, which he has already prepared for us to do.” These ‘good deeds’ are service; these ‘good deeds’ are *your* ministry. Whenever you serve others in *any* way, you’re actually serving God and fulfilling one of your purposes in life (the 4th in particular)...

Jeremiah 1:5a (NCV) says, "Before I made you in your mother's womb, I chose you. Before you were born, I set you apart for a special work...." Folks, each and every one of you were placed on this planet for a special purpose—a special assignment. So, **YOU WERE CREATED TO SERVE GOD.** Also...

YOU WERE SAVED TO SERVE GOD. 1 Timothy 1:9a (TLB) 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 long before the world began—to show his love and kindness to us through

Christ...” In God’s kingdom, we have a place, a purpose, a role, and a function to fulfill ... and that gives our lives great significance & value!

So, we’re back to the first step in our life in Christ called ‘justification’. As I stated last week, justification didn’t take much *effort* on our part, but it took a great effort on God’s part! It cost Jesus, God’s Son, his very life to purchase your salvation. God’s word explains (1 Cor. 6:20, TEV), “...he bought you for a price. So use your bodies for God's glory.”

Through all that Jesus did for us—buying our salvation at a great price, *our past has been forgiven, our present is given meaning, and our future is secured!* So, we need to be serving God out of the reality that our lives have been bought at a price ... that we might be set free from the sin that would otherwise kill us! In other words, *we need to be serving God out of love & grateful hearts...*

1 John 3:14a (NCV) reminds us, “We know we have left death and have come into life because we love each other....” Folks, there’s the proof Christ has inhabited our hearts; we’re loving each other through *servicing* each other in this life. Love is not just a word ... or an idea; it’s an action—a very way of life. **A saved heart ... is a heart that wants to serve others!** As Rick Warren reminds us, “We are healed to help others. We are blessed to be a blessing. We are saved to serve, not sit around and wait for heaven.”

Have you ever wondered *why* God doesn’t just immediately take us up to heaven once we give our hearts to his Son, Jesus? Why does God leave us in a fallen world? He leaves us here to serve him, doesn’t he ... to fulfill his purposes for this ol’ world. So ... once you’re saved, God intends to use you for *his* goals! God has a *ministry* for you in his Church ... and a *mission* for you in his world! **YOU WERE SAVED TO SERVE GOD.** Next...

YOU WERE CALLED TO SERVE GOD. 2 Timothy 1:9a (TEV) says, “He *saved* us and *called* us to be his own people, not because of what we have done, but because of his own purpose....” The truth is, we’re all both *saved* ... and *called* ... by God!

Now, growing up, you may have been taught that *God only called those who were to be in full-time ministry or service to God.* You know, God only calls ... pastors, missionaries, nuns ... and other full-time church workers. But, is that what the Bible says? (I’m so glad you asked...) The Bible tells us clearly that ... *every Christian is called to service.* In other words, regardless of your job or career, as a follower of Jesus Christ *you are called to full-time Christian service...*

There is no such thing as a part-time Christian ... or a non-serving Christian. That would be a contradiction of terms! ‘Non-serving Christian’ would be an oxy-moron. So, **EVERYONE WHO IS SAVED ... IS ALSO CALLED...** And, anytime you use your God-given abilities to help others in any way, you’re fulfilling your *calling* to serve God!

Scripture tells us (Rom. 7:4b, TEV), "...now you belong to him who was raised from death *in order that we might be useful in the service of God.*" There are churches in China who welcome new believers to their congregations in this way: "Jesus now has a new pair of eyes to see with, new ears to listen with, new hands to help with, and a new heart to love others with." In light of us all being called to serve God, I think this might be an appropriate way to welcome folks into the life of our congregation, too! Again, let me remind you of the second purpose—that we are created to be a vital part of God's family! This is why connecting to a local church family is so important; *it is through this family that we fulfill our calling to serve others in practical ways!*

We're called to do this ... as a Body ... together; again, when one part decides to be disconnected or quit functioning with the rest, what happens? The body shuts down, doesn't it? Think of your liver, for instance. What if your liver decided one day that it was tired and didn't want to serve the body anymore? How long would your body continue living? How long would it take before it shut down completely?

The truth is ... *there are thousands of local churches that are dying today ... because of Christians who are unwilling to serve!* They sit on the sidelines as spectators, while the Body suffers & will eventually die. Our Director of Connectional Ministries, Sam Royappa, once said, "*We will be the Church that God has called us to be ... when every member is mobilized for ministry!*" We want to turn the tables on the old adage that "20% of the people do 80% of the work!" That's no way for a church to be healthy, is it? Folks, the truth is ... WE WERE ALL CALLED TO SERVE—both saved & called ... as followers of Jesus Christ! Finally:

YOU WERE COMMANDED TO SERVE GOD. Jesus said (Matthew 20:28, TLB), "Your attitude must be like my own, for I, the Messiah, did not come to be served, but to *serve*, and to *give* my life as a ransom for many." For Christians, *service is NOT an option*—something to be tacked onto our schedules ... if we can spare the time. Instead, *it is the very heart of Christian life!* Jesus came to both 'serve' and to 'give'—two verbs that should define our lives on earth. 'Serving' and 'giving' should sum up God's fourth purpose for our lives; *it's Christ's command for our lives, too!*

Folks, remember that we have been 'shaped for serving God!' *We must now act on and practice what we claim to believe!* Remember, as Rick Warren so succinctly puts it: "Impression without expression causes depression!" It's time to express God's word in our everyday lives...

Have you ever heard of the 'Tale of Two Seas', referring to the two seas in Israel? Both the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea are both fed by the same source of water—the Jordan River. In one—Galilee—we find an incredible fish life and plant life, a very healthy sea indeed. In the other—Dead Sea—there is nothing alive at all. What's the difference? Galilee has both an 'in' and an 'out'—sharing the water that comes down to it from the Mount Hermon springs. The Dead Sea, however, only has an 'in'; there is not 'out' to the Dead Sea. In other words, the one that does not pass on or share what it's been given ... eventually dies; and it's the same with our lives in Christ...

Folks, if we don't serve others as a part of our walk with God, we're missing out on one of the very keys of life! '*You want to begin to grow in your faith like never before?* START SERVING GOD ... in every way that you can think of! It's important to study & know God's word, too, but if that's all we ever do—*indoctrination without application*—we'll never know what God really created us for—who God really created us to be!

Quite frankly, this purpose that we're looking at today—the fourth—may seem easy, but it's not. *Serving* is the opposite of our natural inclination. Most of the time, we're more interested in 'serve us' than in 'service.' But, we need to learn to love like Jesus... How did he love others? It was always 'What can I do for you?' instead of 'What do I get out of it?' That was Jesus' way...

Folks, *we were created to serve, saved to serve, called to serve, and commanded to serve.* Is there anything there that you don't understand? As we heard from Paul's writings last week (Col. 2:7b, *The MSG*), "Now do what you've been taught. School's out; quit studying the subject and start *living* it! And let your living spill over into thanksgiving." Or, as Mother Teresa would say: "Learn to serve God "... with a smile!"