

WEEK 2

“Dead. Alive, and Made for This”

Ephesians 1:15-2:10

WEEK 2 - DAY 1

Not By. For.

Ephesians 2:8-10 (NIV)

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Two prepositions. Ten verses apart. They change everything.

Verse 8: not by works. Verse 10: to do good works. Same letter. Same author. Same passage. And they are not in contradiction — they're the two halves of the most important sentence about the Christian life Paul ever wrote. You are not saved by works. That door is closed completely. There is no amount of serving, giving, attending, praying, or behaving that puts you in right standing with God. Grace is the only currency that buys salvation, and it's not for sale — it's a gift. Paul shuts the performance door firmly in verse 8 so that no one, anywhere, ever, can claim credit for their own rescue.

And then in verse 10 he opens a completely different door. You were created for good works. Not to earn anything. Not to maintain your standing. But because you are God's handiwork — his poem, his craft — and the works were written into the design before you showed up. They're already in your path. Your job is simply to walk it. The difference between these two postures is enormous in practice. Working to earn salvation is exhausting, anxious, and ultimately hopeless — there is no finish line where you've done enough. Working as a response to grace is energizing, free, and oriented by gratitude rather than fear. One is a transaction you can never complete. The other is a life you're already invited into.

Check your motivation honestly. When you serve, when you give, when you show up — is it coming from a sense of obligation and debt, or from a sense of joy and response? The works are the same. The posture behind them is completely different. And Paul says only one of them flows from understanding what grace actually is.

Personal Response

- Honestly: when you do things for God — serve, give, pray, show up — what is primarily driving you? Obligation? Fear? Gratitude? Something else?
- What would change about how you approach the works in front of you this week if you fully believed they were prepared in advance and that you have nothing left to prove?
- Ask God to help you move from “by works” to “for works” — from earning to responding. Tell him specifically where that shift feels hardest.

But God

Ephesians 2:4-5 (NIV)

But God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved.

Two words carry the entire weight of the Christian story: But God.

Before those two words, Paul paints a picture of what our lives looked like without Christ. Dead. Following the current of a world oriented away from God. Satisfying cravings. Living under the quiet weight of what we deserve. It's not a flattering picture, and Paul doesn't soften it. Dead isn't struggling. Dead isn't searching. Dead is dead.

And then: But God.

Those two words are the pivot on which the entire universe turns. Not "but you tried harder." Not "but you finally figured it out." But God, who is rich in mercy. The initiative is entirely his. The action is entirely his. You didn't climb toward the light. He reached into the dark and pulled you out.

There is something deeply important about sitting with this that most of us skip over too quickly. We move fast to the good news without fully feeling the weight of what preceded it. If you don't understand what you were before "but God," you can't fully receive what you are after it. The mercy is only as stunning as the condition it remedied.

Think about your own story. There is a moment — or a season — where those two words changed everything. Maybe it was dramatic and you remember it clearly. Maybe it was slow and you only recognize it looking back. Either way, your story has a "before" and an "after." And the thing that separates them isn't you. It's him.

But God. Two words. Everything.

Personal Response

- Write out your own "But God" moment in a sentence or two. What was true before, and what became true after?
- If you're not sure you've had that moment yet, write honestly about that too. What would it mean for you if it were true?
- Spend a few minutes in gratitude. Thank God specifically for what he reached into and pulled you out of. Be as specific as you can.

You Are the Poem

Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

The Greek word Paul uses here is *poiema* — the word from which we get “poem.” You are God’s poem. His workmanship. His craft. Not a product off an assembly line. Not a rough draft. Something he made with intention, care, and a specific purpose in mind.

Think about what it takes to write a good poem. It isn’t accidental. Every word is chosen. Every line break is intentional. The sounds matter. The rhythm matters. The image in the final line is placed there because the poet knew from the beginning where the whole thing was heading. A poem is one of the most deliberate things a human being can create.

That’s the word Paul reaches for to describe you.

And then he says something that should stop you cold: the good works you are meant to do were “prepared in advance.” Before you showed up. Before you knew what your gifts were. Before you had any idea what your life would look like, God had already written the works into the poem. They’re not an afterthought. They’re part of the original design.

This means two things that don’t always sit comfortably together. First: you have a purpose. Not a vague spiritual purpose but specific works, prepared specifically for you, already waiting in your path. Second: you don’t have to manufacture them. Your job isn’t to create your calling out of nothing. It’s to walk the path God already laid and do the work that’s already there.

The pressure you feel to figure out your purpose, to find your calling, to make something significant of your life — Paul says that pressure is based on a misunderstanding. The poem is already written. The works are already prepared. You don’t write the poem. You live it.

Personal Response

- What do you think the good works prepared for you actually look like? Not the dramatic version — the ordinary, everyday version that’s already in your path.
- Where have you been trying to manufacture your calling rather than simply walk the path God already laid? What would it feel like to stop striving and start paying attention?
- Ask God to help you see the works he’s already placed in front of you today. Then pay attention to what shows up.