

Title: Building a Life of Service
Text: Ephesians 2:10
Preacher: Rev Stu Cameron
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We are in week three of our Time to Build series. Over this season we are being invited to consider how God is calling us to participate in the expansion of our ministry here at Robina and in our church plant on the northern Gold Coast.

Before God builds the church he builds us. Last week we explored what it means to build a life of faith. Our key verse was from Hebrews:

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.
(Hebrews 11:1)

This week we are reflecting on what it means to build a life of service. The message God has laid on my heart is drawn from one verse in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. I invite you to read it out loud with me:

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.
(Ephesians 2:10)

We are going to explore the three phrases that constitute this verse in turn as we ask what it means to build a life of service.

We are God's workmanship

The word translated as workmanship is the Greek word poiema. In other bible versions it is translated as handiwork or masterpiece. We are God's masterpiece – it has a nice ring to it, doesn't it?

Poiema is linked to the ancient Latin word, poetria, which literally translated means poetess.

The Latin word poetria is the root word for our English word, poetry.

We are God's workmanship. We are God's masterpiece. Dare we believe that we are God's poetry?

Does this all sound grandiose, an example of desperate overreaching, of trying to find significance in our existence when there is none? I don't believe so. Consider the words of the Psalmist in Psalm 139. I am reading from Eugene Peterson's Message Translation:

Oh yes, you shaped me first inside, then out; you formed me in my mother's womb. I thank you, High God—you're breathtaking! Body and soul, I am marvelously made! I worship in adoration—what a creation! You know me inside and out, you know every bone in my body; You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit, how I was sculpted from nothing into something.

Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth; all the stages of my life were spread out before you, the days of my life all prepared before I'd even lived one day.
(Psalm 139:13-16)

We are marvellously made. We are fearfully and wonderfully made.

One of the great points of rejoicing for me this year is that God is blessing our community with babies....

Show baby photos

We are God's poetry. Take a moment and tell the person next to you that they are one of God's masterpieces...

The miracle of God's creativity does not end with our conception and birth. As beautiful and magnificent as our lives are, they are marred and stained and hindered and fractured by sin. The bible teaches us that all of have sinned and have fallen short of the hopes and aspirations our Creator God has for us. The symptoms of sin are illness and disease, war and strife, greed and avarice, promiscuity and lust, lying and cheating, hopelessness and despair.

The truth is that because of our sin and the sin of others that has caused suffering in us, we often don't feel like we are God's masterpieces at all. We feel like a broken and forgotten piece of pottery or an unloved painting collecting dust in the corner of a shed.

The good news is that God our Master Craftsman has not forgotten us. Not only has he crafted us as a masterpiece; he remakes us even while we are broken.

In 1463, members of the City Council Florence in Italy decided they needed a monument to enhance their city. They commissioned a sculptor to carve a giant statue to stand in front of city hall.

They approached the famous sculptor Agostino, who agreed to their terms. Agostino went to the quarry near Carrara and marked off a 19-foot slab of white marble to be cut. When the block was removed, it fell, leaving a deep fracture down one side. The sculptor declared the stone useless and demanded another, but the city council refused. Agostino refused to continue. The council commissioned another sculptor, but he hardly got started before he stopped. The gleaming and expensive block of marble lay on its side for decades, a source of embarrassment for all concerned.

In 1501 the council approached another citizen, the son of a local official, asking him if he would complete the ambitious project using the broken slab. The young man's name was Michelangelo. He was 26 years old, filled with energy, skill, and imagination. Michelangelo locked himself inside the workshop behind the cathedral to chisel and polish away on the stone for almost three years.

When the work was finished, it took 49 men five days to bring it to rest before the city hall. Archways were torn down. Narrow streets were widened. The people from across Europe came to see the magnificent 14-foot statue. The statue of David. It was even more than the city fathers had envisioned. The giant stone had been transformed from the massive fractured waste of rock to a masterpiece surpassing the art of either Greece or Rome.

We are God's workmanship, we are God's masterpieces - we are God's poetry.

For those who trust their lives to Jesus, God takes our fractured, broken, sin-stained lives and by the power of the Holy Spirit transforms and re-shapes our lives so that one day when we see Jesus face to face we will be perfect in every way.

Let's go to the next phrase.

Created in Christ Jesus to do good works

We have been recreated, remade in Christ Jesus, through his death and resurrection. As Paul says, when we place our trust and faith in Jesus, when we acknowledge him as Lord and saviour, we are 'new creations.'

If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!
(2 Corinthians 5:17)

If the 'new' is here, what is it 'here' for?

Are we made 'new' so that we can kick back and enjoy the abundant life that Jesus promises?

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Are we made 'new' so we can live a relaxed and comfortable and blessed life?

No! We are not made 'new' by Jesus so that we can step back into lazy comfort, but so that we can step up into world-changing service. In this, Jesus is our model, our exemplar:

The son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many.
(Matthew 20:28)

We are servants of the servant King.

We have been blessed not to soak up more blessings. We have been blessed to be a blessing.

We have been created for service.

This all flies in the face of our culture where receiving, rather than offering service is our default expectation. We live in a culture marked by a sense of entitlement to service rather than a commitment to offer service. A few months ago I was reading some of the complaints a travel company gets from holiday makers:

One English tourist complained the beach was too sandy, and another, and I quote, *'No-one told us there would be fish in the sea. The children were startled.'*

Another tourist complained this way: *'My fiancé and I booked a twin-bedded room but we were placed in a double-bedded room. We now hold you responsible for the fact that I find myself pregnant. This would not have happened if you had put us in the room that we booked.'*

In our culture we demand service, and when we don't get it, we complain. (We even do it in the church!)

But for followers of Jesus, we do not demand service, we offer service. We were not created to be served, but to serve.

Now here is a really important point. Please listen carefully.

I don't serve God out of duty. I don't serve God out of fear. I don't serve God out of guilt. I don't serve God out of anger.

I serve God out of gratitude. I owe Him my life. He saved my life. I'm going to live forever in eternity. He has dealt with my past, empowered my present and filled my future with hope. Because of that I want to serve Him out of gratitude, out of joy, not out of duty.

John Stott puts it this way:

Good works are indispensable to salvation – not as its grounds or means...but as its consequence and evidence.
(John Stott)

Many, if not most of you serve God in amazing ways. In our office, at playgroup, Crossroads, the Op Shop, Newlife Care, Kidzlife...the list goes on.

We want to highlight just two arenas of service that are available through our church. Would you welcome Brendan and Jill as they come up and share with Melissa...

Interview Brendan and Jill

You know, every Christian – no matter how long they have been a follower of Jesus, no matter how old they are, no matter how many or how few gifts they have been blessed with has been created and in turn, called to serve. In the newsletter today there is a brochure that lists some of the many opportunities you have to serve God through the ministries of this church. I encourage you to take it home and prayerfully consider what new area of service God might be calling you into, and then return it marked accordingly so that we can give you more information.

This morning I have focussed on the opportunities you have to serve God through the ministries of our church. That is one arena of service. The second, even more critical arena of service is in your family, your workplace, your school, your retirement village, your soccer club and so on. The second arena is your everyday life. We don't just serve God on Sunday or at church. We serve God 24/7. And as we serve, we are salt and light to the world, seasoning and illuminating it with the love and grace of God.

A few years ago there was a report in the New York Times about Cremona, Italy, where most experts believe history's best violins were made. A man called Andrea Mosconi has the amazing task of keeping the precious instruments in shape. For the past 30 years, six days a week, the old musician has gone to the museum in Cremona's city hall where the 300-year-old violins are stored in display cases.

Each morning, before the museum opens to the public, he plays each violin for 6–7 minutes. He starts with basic music scales and then makes his way to Bach and Tchaikovsky. Over the course of an hour, he plays eight violin and a cello, including three violins made by the most famous craftsman, Stradivari.

Why does he do this day after day? The very simple reason is that a violin needs to be played to perform at its best level. "The wood gets tired," explained Karl Roy, a German violinmaker and one of the field's top experts. "It's the same as with a human being. If you just sit and rest in your comfortable chair, when you get up after a while, you will feel crazy."

We are not saved by Jesus, remade by Jesus, empowered by Jesus to sit back in our comfortable chair and go a little crazy.

We are created, called and empowered to serve. We were made to be played – to emit a beautiful, heavenly sound. This is our God-given destiny.

Some of us may be tempted to believe that it is possible to be a Christian and to control our own life, to be master of our own destiny. Paul shatters this myth when he says:

You are not your own; you were bought at a price.
(1 Corinthians 6:19)

Author and Pastor Greg Laurie tells an amazing story which helps illustrate this point.

An older woman finished her grocery shopping and returned to her car. She found four men inside the car. She dropped her shopping bags, drew a handgun from her handbag, and screamed, "I have a gun, and I know how to use it! Get out of the car." Those men did not wait for a second invitation; they got out and ran like crazy.

The woman, somewhat shaken, loaded her shopping bags and then got into the car. But no matter how she tried, she could not get her key into the ignition. Then it dawned on her: her car was parked four or five spaces away!

She loaded her grocery bags into her own car and then drove to the police station to turn herself in. The policeman who she told the story nearly fell off his chair laughing. He pointed to the other end of the counter, where four men were reporting a carjacking by an old woman with thick glasses and curly white hair, less than five feet tall, and carrying a large handgun. No charges were filed.

The woman thought it was her car to drive, but it really belonged to someone else. We think our lives are our own to drive, but they really belong to God. Again, Paul says this in Romans:

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Whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.
(Romans 14:8)

The last phrase is this:

Which God prepared in advance for us to do.

In the New Testament there are two Greek words which are translated as time.

First, there is chronos. Chronos time is elapsed or sequential time – time that passes. Most of you have on your wrists a chronograph – a watch that measures chronos or elapsed time.

The second New Testament word for time is a lot more interesting. The word is kairos. When it is used in the bible it means the appointed time in the purposes of God. A kairos time is a moment or season in chronos time. It is a supreme, or opportune or divinely appointed time.

An example of kairos time is when Jesus announces his public ministry in the first chapter of Mark. He says 'The time has come – the kairos moment has arrived, God's divinely appointed time is here – the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe!' (Mark 1:15)

A kairos time is a divinely appointed instant whose time has come.

We are in a kairos moment, a kairos season in our church.

God has prepared for us good works which he has prepared for us to do. Our choice is whether we will embrace and seize these God-given opportunities. The writer of Ecclesiastes famously said:

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build.
(Ecclesiastes 3:1-3)

It is time for us to serve. Some of us God is calling to serve in ways we never considered before – in our Kids ministry, as an RE teacher, with our Princess for a Day ministry or even as part of Orrell and Christine's church plant team.

Every one of us, without exception, is called to serve.

It is also time for our church to build. For more than ten years we have been dreaming, praying and planning for this season as God calls us to extend our facilities here. God has gifted us with almost ten acres of land right in the heart of our city ad a growing church. If we were not to develop it by extending our facilities, then frankly, we should sell the land and give the money away. The time is now to build!

We are not building a monument to our perceived success. In God's strength, we are building a legacy that future generations will benefit from. A place for thousands of people we have not met yet. A place for people who are at the moment far from God but one day will cry out to Him, 'Abba, Father!' It is a place not for us, but for those who are to come.

It is time to build.

And it is time for us to give.

We have all been given the privilege to serve God with our time, with our talents and with our money. God gives us the privilege of investing the resources he has blessed us with the work of his kingdom. That is why we are calling everyone who calls Newlife home to consider how God might be calling them to give to our Time to Build program.

Over the last couple of months Sue and I have been doing just that; searching after God for what amount it is he is calling us to give to Time to Build. Like a lot of people here we have a mortgage, school fees and other costs which seem to be ever-increasing and so the prospect of giving above and beyond what we already do in tithes and offerings and to our Vision 1000 appeal frankly scared us. But we talked and we prayed, and we talked and we prayed some more. We discussed various figures. And then a week or so ago we settled on the amount we believe God is calling us to give.

Over the next three years we believe God is calling our family to give \$24,000 to Time to Build, over and above our existing giving. Today will be the first and only time we share that figure with you. We do so for two reasons – we want you to know that we as your Pastors are not just talking hypothetically here, we have skin in the game. Second, we hope that it is an encouragement to you. I have said before that I believe that every person in our church has the opportunity to participate in the miracle of provision God is going to do in and through us over the coming weeks. How is God calling you and your family to participate? What is he calling you to give?

In all of this, God is not calling us to make equal gifts, but to make equal sacrifices – to give in accordance with the ability God has granted us to give.

Now is the time to serve, to build and to give.

Skye Jethani went on a trip to India with his father when he was a small boy. While walking the streets of New Delhi, an Indian boy approached them. He was "skinny as a rail, and naked but for tattered blue shorts. His legs were stiff and contorted, like a wire hanger twisted upon itself."

Because of his condition, the little boy could only waddle along on his calloused knees. He made his way toward Skye and his father and cried out, "One rupee, please! One rupee!"

Skye's father eventually asked the boy, "What do you want?"

"One rupee, sir," the boy said while motioning his hand to his mouth and bowing his head in deference.

Skye's father laughed and replied, "How about I give you five rupees?"

The boy suddenly became defiant. He withdrew his hand and sneered at Skye and his father. He thought the offer of 5 rupees was a joke, that they were having a laugh at his expense. After all, no one would willingly give up five rupees. The boy started shuffling away, mumbling curses under his breath.

But then Skye's father reached into his pocket. Hearing the coins jingle, the boy stopped and looked back over his shoulder. My father was holding out a five-rupee coin. He approached the stunned boy and placed the coin into his hand. The boy didn't move or say a word. He just stared at the coin in his hand. We passed him and proceeded to cross the street.

A moment later the shouting resumed, except this time the boy was yelling, "Thank you! Thank you, sir! Bless you!" He raced after us once again—but not for more money but to touch my father's feet. ..."

Sometimes we find it hard to believe. Sometimes we think it is all too good to be true.

When Jesus says that it is more blessed to give to receive, we mutter under our breath, 'You're kidding aren't you.'

When Jesus says that to find our life, first we must lose it, we are tempted to think it is cruel joke.

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When Paul says that we are God's workmanship, God's masterpieces, God's poetry – created and re-created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God himself has prepared for us to do – it all sounds like a figment of someone's overactive imagination.

But God our heavenly Father looks on us with mercy, forgiveness and love. He wants the absolute best for us as his children. And we discover that best as we trust him with our lives.

So I dare you. God challenges you.

Trust him with our life.

Serve him with your gifts.

Honor him with your money.

Let us hear it one more time;

We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God himself has prepared for us to do.
(Ephesians 2:10)