

Women of God, Have You Made Yourself Available for His Purposes?

The truth is simple but profound ... you don't have to go to India, have a TV show or be on staff at a church to be a woman in ministry.

You don't have to write articles for Christian magazines, be invited to speak at conferences or have a husband who pastors a megachurch in order to be used significantly by God.

A woman in ministry is a woman who has made herself available for the purposes and plans of God. If your heart's desire is to be used by God at your moment in history, take a deep breath and look around. Your circumstances are not accidental nor are they insignificant. God has placed you where you are for His strategic and eternal plan.

The people in your life are all desperately in need of someone who will simply love them unconditionally ... and that is where you come in.

You got the job.

Jesus has hired you to love the unlovable ... to show grace to the fractious ... and to bring joy to the discouraged.

You are here not for prestige, for fame or for earthly power. You are here to be a vessel of God's mercy, His hope and His power.

You got the job.

A woman in ministry is a woman who encourages the single mom in the checkout line at the grocery store. A woman in ministry is a woman who prays for the students and teachers at

her children's school. A woman in ministry is a woman who smiles at strangers, cheers on the weary and finds a way to demonstrate the love of God in little ways every day.

A woman in ministry is a force to be reckoned with not because of a prestigious title or due to a significant position in a well-known ministry but because of her enormous heart. She has a heart that is filled to overflowing with the power of the Holy Spirit and is unable to hold back that which has been placed inside of her.

A woman in ministry is unable to stop talking about that which she has seen and heard. She is compelled to exhibit the fruits of the spirit in the home, in the marketplace, on the street and at the church. A woman in ministry has been commissioned to tell the story of Jesus in word and in deed. She tells it to the aged, to the lonely, to the misfits, to the fortunate, to little people and to rebels.

I believe that the most powerful women in ministry in any age are not those who receive financial remuneration for their services. I also know for certain that the most dynamic world-changing women of any generation are not those whose names are synonymous with cultural recognition.

The women who are the truest champions of the faith are often the most unknown, underappreciated and underpaid servants in any generation and yet they are called, anointed and powerful.

Are you a woman? Do you love Jesus? You got the job! {eoa}

Carol McLeod is an author and popular speaker at women's conferences and retreats, where she teaches the Word of God with great joy and enthusiasm. Carol encourages and empowers women with passionate and practical biblical messages mixed with her own special brand of hope and humor. She has written five books, including *No More Ordinary*, *Holy Estrogen!*, *The Rooms of a Woman's Heart* and *Defiant Joy!* Her most recent book, *Refined: Finding Joy in the Midst of the Fire*, was

released last August. Her teaching DVD *The Rooms of a Woman's Heart* won the Telly Award, a prestigious industry award for excellence in religious programming. You can also listen to Carol's "A Jolt of Joy" program daily on the Charisma Podcast Network. Connect with Carol at .

How to Regard Trials as Pure Joy

How are we to regard trials as pure joy? *Only by sufficient motivation.*

In Moses' case it was because of the reward he believed would be his later (See Hebrews 11:24-26). It was even what motivated Jesus. Imagine that! It was the joy that lay ahead that kept Him going (Hebrews 12:2). He was not enjoying the cross, not for a second. But it was because of the great joy that was going to His that He was able to endure the cross. He considered it pure joy because pure joy was coming. And it came!

James tells us, therefore, that trials are a good thing—if we have a positive attitude toward them when they come. He certainly doesn't say we will enjoy them. Instead, we endure them. But we regard the thought of them as pure joy because of what these trials can do for us. They are, says Peter, more precious than gold (1 Pet. 1:7).

The greater the suffering, the greater the anointing. If it is anointing you want, then expect suffering. If it is a great anointing you want, anticipate great suffering at some stage. The anointing is the power of the Holy Spirit to make us do what we do with ease and without fatigue.

The main reason for burnout and fatigue is almost certainly because someone has gone beyond his anointing; he went outside it rather than functioning within it. It was because he could not accept the limits of his ability. None of us can do everything, but to the person who is not content with the anointing or gift that he or she has, there will be trouble ahead.

It is humbling to accept our limits, but there is considerable joy and peace in doing so, not to mention an increase of anointing. We can pray for a greater anointing—namely, an ability to do what we previously could not do in our own strength—but until that anointing has come, we must accept the limits of our faith and ability.

I myself would prefer a greater anointing than anything. It is literally what I want most in the entire world. In a word: more of God. This way, I can achieve all He wants of me. He never promotes us to the level of our incompetence. As long as we are content with the calling He has chosen for us, we will live and move at the level He has seen fit to give us.

This is partly what is meant when the psalmist said, “He chose our inheritance for us” (Ps. 47:4). It can be a testing in itself when we come to terms with His determination of what talent He has decided to give us. We may envy another’s anointing. It is the way Peter felt when told how he would die, and all he could apparently think of is how John would die. Jesus replied, in so many words, “That’s none of your business—just follow Me and quit looking over your shoulder.” (See John 21:18-23).

A.W. Tozer used to say that we could have as much of God as we want. When I first came across this comment, I disagreed. But now I know what he meant. We do not prove how much we want of God merely by the intense desire at the moment. We prove it by how we react to circumstances in life, and the opportunities given to us to do such things dignify the trials He hands us

on our silver platter.

When we are content with the anointing God chose for us, we do what we are called to do without fatigue. "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:13). When I become mentally and emotionally fatigued in what I am doing, it is a fairly strong hint that I have chosen to move outside my anointing and what God specifically asked me to do. As long as I do *what* He called me to do and *no more*, I will not be edging toward burnout.

And yet I would like to have more anointing than I have! This is a legitimate desire because Paul told us to desire earnestly the greater gifts (1 Cor. 12:31). God will answer this request so long as it is sought with His glory in mind; He will answer the request if it is His will (1 John 5:14), God will consequently supply the need for this by granting the necessary anointing required for what I am called to do.

If, then, it is a greater anointing I truly want, and I wake up with one big enormous trial before me, I should grasp it with both hands! I must consider this pure joy! This is because the trial is a fairly strong hint from the Lord Jesus that I am going to receive the anointing for which I long. He knows what I want more than anything, so if He sends a trial or testing my way, then I have every reason to believe that the anointing I long for is coming—if I dignify the trial at hand.

James sees a time ahead for the person who dignifies the trial that will bring indescribable peace, the highest level of anointing, the soul uncluttered by greed, and a heart filled with the very presence of God. It is pure joy.

In other words, if you consider a trial to be pure joy, it will lead you to pure joy. Count it pure joy, call it pure joy, regard the trial as pure joy, and one day you will experience pure joy for yourself. I promise it!

✘ Adapted from Pure Joy by **R. T. Kendall**, copyright 2015, published by Charisma House. The Christian faith promises inexpressible and glorious joy. This book will show you the difference between trials and temptations and how trials can lead you to joy. It will help you experience the four levels of joy and see how you can receive God's gift of gladness in every trial. To order your copy [click here](#).

Prayer Power for the Week of February 14, 2016

Although you can't avoid trials in this life, determine this week to ask the Lord to help you "dignify the trial" when it comes and count it as "pure joy." Bring your thoughts and feelings into agreement with the Word of God and cry out for His grace (enabling power) to help you to do all things, even give thanks in the midst of your most challenging circumstances. Ask the Lord to show you ways in which you can meet needs, share love and be a blessing to others who are hurting and suffering loss. Continue to pray for the nation and worldwide revival (1 Thess. 5:18).

44 Days Before Easter: The Contrast of 2 Kings

When it came to worldly wealth, King Herod had it all. Money, power, possessions—there was nothing he lacked or wanted. He lacked nothing except, perhaps, inner peace.

On the other hand, as the Son of God, Jesus didn't gather many worldly possessions or money but was a man on Earth of peace and love and was filled with inner contentment. Herod had no regard for human life, and Jesus came to save the world.

In this video devotional, Christian author and Pastor Jamie Buckingham takes a look at the lives of both King Jesus and King Herod and contrasts the two.

*For more information on **Jamie Buckingham** and his ministry, please visit .*

Do You Have a Father-Son Bucket List?

Men long for adventure. We long to explore, to create and to discover. This world is full of adventures waiting to unfold—it's up to us to pursue them.

So when was the last time you took your son on an adventure? Do you have any plans for any exciting journeys with him in the future? Take a few moments and sit down with him to put together bucket list ideas of things you'd like to do together. Here are some possibilities to help get you started:

Simple Ideas That Cost Nothing or Very Little

- Take a camping trip.
- Ride the biggest roller coaster you can find.
- Build a tree house.
- Teach your son to drive stick shift.
- Go rock climbing.
- Cook out on the grill.

- Figure out your family.
- Make a time capsule.
- Take surfing lessons.
- Hike to the top of a mountain.
- Go white water rafting.
- Serve an elderly neighbor, widow or widower.
- Make “Manna Bags” for the poor and hungry.
- Pray together.

Other Ideas You Can Save Up For

- Go on a deep sea or fly-fishing trip.
- Visit the Hall of Fame of your favorite sport.
- Take a road trip to Washington, D.C., and see our nation’s capital.
- Take a missions trip to another country together.

Of course, I know there are plenty of great experiences for fathers and sons to share together that I didn’t list above. The most important thing is that you focus on things your son is passionate about.

Mark Merrill is the president of *Family First and All Pro Dad*. For the original article, visit [.](#)

Valentine's Day: 5 Health Benefits of Chocolate

Chocolate has been linked with Valentine's Day for decades, but its connection with love and seduction goes back centuries. Its health attributes also go back centuries: Legend says the Aztec's Montezuma drank honey mixed with chocolate each day to keep up his stamina.

Chocolate houses in 17th century London claimed it cured diseases, and Marie Antoinette's chocolate maker used chocolate mixtures to aid digestion and calm nerves.

During the 20th century, chocolate gained a reputation as being responsible for weight gain, high cholesterol and acne. Chefs named chocolate-laden desserts as "death by chocolate."

However, during the past 20 years, chocolate has almost been proclaimed as a miracle food because of an onslaught of scientific studies showing health benefits in areas ranging from heart diseases to Alzheimer's. "Health by chocolate" may now be a more accurate phrase.

"Cacao beans are rich in flavonols, a type of flavonoid that has antioxidant qualities, which are believed to help prevent damage caused by free radicals in the body," Alexandra Miller, RDN, LDN, and corporate dietitian at Medifast Inc., tells *Newsmax Health*.

Check out the following benefits of chocolate:

Alzheimer's: Eating a small amount of chocolate every day may keep your brain sharp as you age. An Italian study discovered that chemicals called flavanols that are found in chocolate can substantially reduce the risk of developing mild cognitive impairment in seniors—and can even reverse it.

Seniors with mild cognitive impairment drank either 990 mg, 520 mg or 45 mg of a chocolate flavored drink daily. After eight weeks, participants who drank the higher levels of flavanol drinks had significantly higher cognitive scores than those drinking the lower-level drinks. Researchers believe flavanols shield neurons from injury and may also increase blood flow to the brain.

Another study, published in the *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease*, found that cocoa extract reduces the type of brain damage seen in Alzheimer's patients long before symptoms develop. Mice genetically engineered to mimic Alzheimer's disease were fed Lavado, a special preparation of cocoa extract, which is high in a form of antioxidants called polyphenols.

The extract prevented amyloid plaques—a characteristic of Alzheimer's disease that damages nerve cells—from forming in the brain.

“Given that cognitive decline in Alzheimer's disease is thought to start decades before symptoms appear, we believe our results have broad implications for the prevention of Alzheimer's disease and dementia,” said lead investigator Dr. Giulio Maria Masinetti.

Obesity: Instead of causing obesity, several studies have found that chocolate can actually help you keep slim. A study of Californians published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* found that those who ate chocolate more frequently had a lower BMI (body mass index) than those who seldom ate it.

Another study, this one an analysis of European teens from Spain's University of Granada, found that those who ate chocolate had lower levels of total body fat, including abdominal fat, than those who avoided it.

“To gain the health benefits of chocolate while watching your

waistline, stick with a moderate portion of pure dark chocolate—about 1 ounce—made from at least 70 percent cacao a few times per week,” says dietitian Miller.

Diabetes: A cup of cocoa before bedtime can help you avoid diabetes, according to research published by the *European Journal of Nutrition*. Mice were fed a high-fat diet—the type that leads to Type 2 diabetes—but were also given cocoa powder in the human equivalent of 10 tablespoons. After 10 weeks, the amount of inflammation, which can trigger Type 2 diabetes by causing insulin resistance, was dramatically reduced. Researchers believe high amounts of flavanols, a natural antioxidant found in cocoa, are responsible for its protective effect.

A study published in the *Journal of Food Nutrition* found that people who eat diets high in flavonoids, such as those found in dark chocolate, lower their risk of Type 2 diabetes. Experts believe that flavonoids lower insulin resistance by raising the production of adiponectin, a protein that regulates glucose metabolism. “This is an exciting finding that shows that some components of foods we considered unhealthy like chocolate or wine may contain some beneficial substances,” said study co-author Tim Spector.

Heart attack and stroke: A 2015 English study published in the journal *Heart*, found that 12 percent of middle-aged and older adults who ate up to 3.5 ounces of chocolate a day (more than in two regular-sized Hershey’s bars) developed cardiovascular disease during the study compared to 17.4 percent of those who avoided the tasty treat.

That’s only the latest study to show chocolate helps prevent heart disease. An eight-year German study of almost 20,000 people found that those who ate an average of about two ounces of chocolate each day reduced their risk of both heart attacks and strokes by 39 percent.

A British review of seven studies found a 29 percent reduced risk of stroke in those who ate chocolate more than twice a week, and a 10-year Australian study found that women over the age of 70 who ate chocolate at least once a week were 60 percent less likely to die from heart failure during the study. In addition, a Swedish study found that women who ate more than 1.5 ounces of chocolate a week decreased their risk of stroke by 20 percent when compared to women who ate less than a third of an ounce every week.

Compounds in chocolate have been shown to improve circulation and to have blood-thinning properties. "In addition to its antioxidant power, flavonols appear to help improve cardiovascular health, namely by lowering blood pressure, improving blood flow to the brain and heart, and making blood platelets less sticky and able to clot," says Miller.

Although dark chocolate is usually recommended, studies have found that milk chocolate can also be beneficial. A Swedish study of more than 37,000 men found that those who ate about one-third cup of chocolate chips each week reduced their risk of stroke by 19 percent when compared to men who ate no chocolate at all. For every one-quarter cup increase in chocolate every week, the risk of stroke decreased an additional 14 percent.

Stress: In a study published in the *Journal of Proteome Research*, people who reported feeling highly stressed ate 1.4 ounces of dark chocolate (a regular Hershey's bar contains ounces) a day. Blood and urine samples found lower levels of the stress hormones cortisol and catecholamines at the end of two weeks.

Persistent coughs: A natural chemical found in chocolate called theobromine may stop both acute and chronic coughs, according to research taking place in England. When people with a persistent cough were given theobromine twice a day for 14 days, 60 percent of them experienced relief. An earlier

study found the chemical was more effective at stopping coughs than codeine. Researchers say the amount of theobromine found in a daily bar of chocolate is enough to block the nerves that stimulate the cough reflex.

“Know that while certain types of chocolate have shown promising benefits, there is still a lot we do not know, such as the quantity of chocolate and frequency at which it needs to be consumed to reap the benefits,” says Miller.

“Simply put, more research is needed,” she said. “So for now, enjoy in moderation and look for unsweetened and/or the least processed options you can find.”

For the original article, visit [.](#)

45 Days Before Easter: ‘Such Is the Price of Being Chosen’

Israel has been a land of strife and conflict since the days of Abraham. Not many nations on earth have been through as many wars, suffered as much grief and seen as much bloodshed as Israel.

However, Israel is a blessed and highly favored nation, the late Jamie Buckingham said in this video devotional from 1988.

“Terrorists think they can destroy Israel just like 2000 years ago when Satan thought he could stop the Messiah from saving the world by nailing Him to a cross,” Buckingham said.

The persecution of Israel’s people was summed up by a rabbi Buckingham met at the Western Wall in Jerusalem: “Such is the price of being chosen.”

Watch more of Buckingham's message as this series continues:
{eoa}

4 Ways to Make Valentine's Day About Your Spouse

It's here, fellas. Valentine's Day is upon us.

To some, the mere thought may cause you to break into a cold sweat. It's the one day of the year when we are supposed to be, no, have to be, romantic with our spouse. Well, Valentine's Day is really not the only day of the year we are supposed to be romantic, but it is one of those days when we are encouraged to do so and may be judged if we're not.

For those of us who don't know the meaning of the word *romantic* or who don't have a romantic bone in our bodies, it can be a challenge. For those of us who struggle in the romance department, there is a trick, a *hack* that can help you be the most romantic person on every day of the year. It's simple, but not easy. When it comes to Valentine's Day, it's not about you—and neither is your marriage.

When we understand this and act according to it, romance will be easy. Try this: Think back to your dating days before you and your spouse were married. One of your biggest priorities was making things about her.

The restaurant, the date night activity, the clothes or cologne you wore, the doors you opened for her. You made it about her. Then you got married. Maybe you chose to go wherever to eat, date nights disappeared, and she didn't

always smell the fresh fragrance of cologne on you. Now, she may not only have to open her own doors but has to get the kids in the door herself.

To be more romantic, don't make things about your happiness but about your wife's happiness instead. When you do that, you'll be romantic in her eyes. And Valentine's Day will be just an extension of the natural romantic that you now are. Here are four ways you can make Valentine's Day and your marriage not about you but about your wife.

1. Set her apart. Your wife has a spot that nobody else can or should occupy. Not your kids, your parents, your golfing buddies, your boss or anybody. Let her know this and let others know this with your words and actions.

2. Take on the hard stuff on her behalf. Ever heard of "good cop, bad cop"? Sometimes you have to be the "bad cop" in your marriage in order to keep her looking good. Be willing to have the next couple of difficult conversations with your kids or family members. Do whatever you can to take some of the heat off her. Volunteer for some of the harder cleaning items around the house, particularly the ones you know she hates.

3. Love her like you'd want to be loved. You probably treat yourself pretty darn good. You do your best to encourage yourself, to take care of your body and do what you think is best for you. Do that for your wife. Love her in a way that makes her feel loved. Be sure to find out her love language first.

4. Get close and intimate with her. Intimacy is doing or sharing things with a person that you don't do with anyone else. Do that with your wife. Share your deepest feelings, concerns, fears, dreams and anything else. Don't hold anything back, and don't let anything get between you and her. When you do these things, you will have no problem being romantic, and your wife will know Valentine's Day and your marriage is not

about you but your love for her.

Jackie Bledsdoe is an author, blogger and speaker, but first and foremost a husband and father of three who helps men better lead and love the ones who matter most.

God Is Pouring Out Prophetic Visions in This Season

In this hour of Christianity, God is looking for those who will stand watch, station themselves on the watchtower and keep watch to see what the Lord will say—and answer when they are reproved.

God is looking for those with a Habakkuk spirit who will not only see and hear, but record and proclaim—and keep proclaiming until the people's ears and eyes open to what the Lord is saying and doing. Once, when Habakkuk stood on the wall, He heard the Lord say this:

“Write the vision, and make it plain on tablets, that he who reads it may run. For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but it speaks of an end and does not lie. If it delays, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay” (Hab. 2:2-3).

LISTEN TO JENNIFER'S PODCAST ON THIS TOPIC: Contending for the Prophetic Vision.

A Remnant Rising With Clear Vision

This is a right-now word for the body of Christ. There is a remnant rising with a clear vision from the Lord. Not everyone will catch that vision, but we must continue to speak it forth. It's not man's vision, it's God's vision.

In Habakkuk 2:2, the Lord told the man of God to write the vision. God intended for the prophet to make a record of what he heard. This is important for the sake of accuracy. When God speaks, whether in a conference setting or your prayer closet or somewhere in between, we need to make every effort to record the utterance so we don't miss a word of what God is saying—or inadvertently add to what He said.

JOIN JENNIFER ON FACEBOOK FOR SPIRITUAL COMMENTARY AND ENCOURAGEMENT. [CLICK HERE.](#)

It's important to understand that this oft-cited verse is not talking about just any vision. According to the KJV Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon, the word "vision" in that verse comes from the Hebrew word, *chazown*, which means vision (in ecstatic state); vision (in the night); vision, oracle, prophecy (divine communication) and vision (as title of book of prophecy).

Clearly, we need to embrace the Lord's vision. Unless the Lord builds the house—or the business or the family or anything else for that matter—they labor in vain who build it (Ps. 127:1). Maybe the Lord has given you prophetic vision for a project or for your life or maybe you are praying for a new vision. He's pouring out new prophetic visions in this season.

Rocking Religious Mindsets

Because these prophetic visions will rock religious mindsets and shake the status quo, you'll have to be determined to write them down, meditate on them day and night and, as Habakkuk 2:2 says, make it plain.

In other words, you need to rely on the Holy Spirit to interpret the vision rightly so that you can declare it clearly to those who are called to run alongside you in the vision. As Paul the apostle wrote, "If the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for the battle?" (1 Cor. 14:8).

Believe me, there's going to be a war over the prophetic vision God gave you—or the vision God gave your leader—and if you aren't clear, if it's not plain, you won't run with it or rise up and defend it from the enemy's abortive plans. Prophecy always brings warfare because the devil is after the word.

Exercising Patience for the Prophetic Vision

God has given some of you prophetic blueprints and plans that seem unimaginable. Some of you have been plowing for a long while now and aren't seeing the fruit you expected at this point in the journey. Take heart. Don't give up.

Habakkuk 2:3 says the vision is for an appointed time. The Hebrew word for time in that verse is *moade*, which according to the KJV Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon means “appointed time, sacred season, set feasted, appointed season, appointed meeting, appointed place and appointed sign or signal.”

When God gives you a prophetic vision, it's inspiring. Waiting is the hard part. We must remember not to grow weary in well-doing because we'll reap in due season if we don't faint (Gal. 6:9). We must also remember that we inherit the promises of God through faith and patience (Heb. 6:12). And we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). And remember this:

“Where there is no vision, the people perish, but happy is he who keeps the teaching” (Prov. 19:18). The Hebrew word for “vision” in this verse is also “chazown.” It speaks to prophetic vision. Keep casting the prophetic vision confidently or the people will let go, let loose and ignore what God is saying—and so may you.

If you don't give up, if you're diligent to keep declaring the prophetic vision, it will come to pass in the *kairos* moment. God is not a man that He should lie or the son of man that He should repent. As the Lord told Habakkuk, “If it delays, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay.”

46 Days Before Easter: 'It Is a Time for Repentance and Fasting'

Today, many Christians will celebrate Ash Wednesday and the beginning of the season of Lent, what charismatic Christian preacher and author Jamie Buckingham calls "a wonderful season of walking with God and a fresh commitment to Jesus Christ."

The ashes many receive on their foreheads today are a symbol of repentance, humility, fasting and prayer.

In this video, Buckingham details the significance of the season of Lent from the Western Wall in Jerusalem: {eoa}

Faith Without Works: Are You Really a Christian?

Recently I taught through Matthew 10 at our Friday morning Man in the Mirror Bible study. I described the chapter as "Jesus Pilot Tests the Great Commission."

After spending two years with his disciples, Jesus selected the 12 men he wanted, then sent them to pilot test his strategy for total global conquest. The Great Commission is for us too. In praying for his disciples, Jesus said, "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world... I

pray also for those who will believe in me through their message" (John 17:18, 20, NIV).

During one of several messages on Matthew 10, I told the men I had a couple of hard things to say. First, "If you are getting better treatment than described in Matthew 10, are you sure you are on the right path?" Second, "You either need to do the work (of making disciples), get trained to do the work, or admit that you're not really in the deal."

One of my dear friends told me that he thought I was too harsh. I thought a lot about that. The next week, I explained to the men at our Bible study that I would rather give men false doubt about their salvation than false assurance. Actually, I said I would rather not make an error in either direction! I would rather be able to walk the tightrope and neither cause men to wrongly doubt their salvation when they are saved, nor wrongly believe they are saved if they are not.

Oversimplifying the Gospel

If you were going to err—and I hope you don't—would it not be better for some men who are saved to wrongly doubt their salvation? Here's the problem. All the risks of false doubt are temporal, but all the risks of false assurance are eternal. Again, I would rather not make a mistake at all. But if I do, God save me from oversimplifying what the gospel must cost a man—"easy believism."

Actually, I am struck by how blunt Jesus is. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). Authentic discipleship is more than professing faith.

We Are Created for Good Works

In the famous passage Ephesians 2:8-9, Paul made it clear that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, and not because of anything we do. Yet in verse 10, he goes on to say,

“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Good works, deeds, or bearing fruit are integral to Christian faith. James wrote, “What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds?... Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (James 2:14, 17). Martin Luther’s chief lieutenant, Philip Melancthon, said, “Justification is by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone.”

So What Does It Mean?

If a man has truly and earnestly repented of his sins and put his faith in Jesus Christ alone for his eternal salvation, then the matter is settled.

However, if a man professes faith and produces no fruit, he would be wise to question the authenticity of his faith. Better to risk false doubt than false assurance.

Someone who has been walking with Christ for a long time will usually produce more fruit than someone who has recently made a profession of faith. If a man doesn’t produce fruit early on, that doesn’t mean he will not do so as he matures spiritually. Yet if a man produces no fruit after many years of professing faith, he would be wise to be concerned.

Nevertheless, it’s biblical for the quality of our service to Christ to differ from person to person. We see that in Matthew 25 in the parable of the talents. In 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 we’re told, “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.” In other words, no good work can improve on your salvation.

However, the text goes on to say, “If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light ... If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping

through the flames.”

So the message is: If you have genuinely repented of your sins and received Jesus as your Savior, then you are saved for all eternity. However, if you are of “weak faith” and don’t apply yourself, your salvation will be like “escaping through the flames.”

The Incomparable Love of God

Every single human being on the face of the planet was created by God, is known intimately by God, and is taken care of by him. He knows our thoughts from afar. He knows every breath we take. He knows every word before it forms on the tip of our tongue. He knit us together in our mother’s womb (see Ps. 139).

He watches everyone closely, examining every person on earth (see Ps. 11:4). Every hair on our heads has been counted (see Matt. 10:30). He has determined how long we will live and the exact places where we will live (see Acts 17:26).

You are very special to God. God loves you very much. Nothing you do will ever make you good enough for God to love you. Nothing you have done will ever make you bad enough for God not to forgive you. Your salvation does not depend on doing good works, yet genuine salvation results in good works. Good works don’t earn merit. Good works don’t lead to the cross, but are the evidence that you have the cross.

Make Your Salvation Sure

Let’s not take salvation for granted. Let’s not tell men who sit on their thumbs, “That’s okay. Don’t worry about it. God loves you anyway.” Instead, let’s exhort men to faith and the good deeds that demonstrate faith. That was Paul’s message, “I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. ... I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds” (Acts 26:19-20).

You and I are of infinite value to the One who created us,

sustains us and, if we turn to him in humble, repentant faith, will redeem us. To be a Christian is to be a disciple of Jesus. To be a disciple of Jesus is the highest honor to which a human being can aspire. How does that happen?

God loves you very much, and he wants you to repent of your sins, put your faith in Jesus, and then give evidence of your repentance by doing the work for which you have been created. That's the simple, beautiful message of the gospel.

If anyone has been relying on "easy believism," they can make their salvation sure by faith and repentance, then do the work—or get trained to do the work. Our great God has something very special he wants each of us to do.

Pat Morley is the Founder and CEO of Man in the Mirror. After building one of Florida's 100 largest privately held companies, in 1991, he founded Man in the Mirror, a non-profit organization to help men find meaning and purpose in life. Dr. Morley is the bestselling author of *The Man in the Mirror*, *No Man Left Behind*, *Dad in the Mirror*, and *A Man's Guide to the Spiritual Disciplines*.